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Then hand in hand, and blushing very much, Pedro and Petronilla
stood before her

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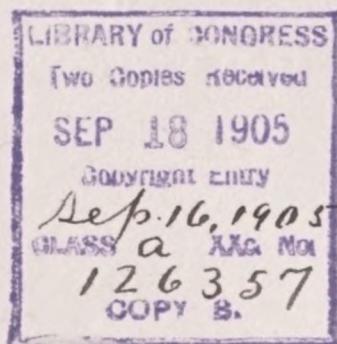
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AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
TO MY TWO NIECES
FRANKE AND DOLLIE

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CHAPTER I

THE INMATES OF THE OLD CASTLE

Pedro and Petronilla lived in a country called Béarn or French Navarre, now the southwest corner of France. It was a beautiful region watered by sparkling streams and dotted by vine-clad hills where grapes, kissed by the golden sunshine, ripened into delicious richness, later to yield their juices for amber and ruby wine.

Above the hills and on the south of them lay, like a string of pearls, the snow-capped Pyrenees, and this boy and girl lived in a castle built on the side of one of the mountains.

Many years ago the walls of their home had echoed with the laughter of noble and even of royal guests, and a host of retainers here had served their masters, while richly-clad ladies and gentlemen had tripped up and down its broad staircase and had danced in its long salon.

But the present owner had no money with which to entertain distinguished guests, and bats and owls flew in and out through the banquet-hall, which was in a portion of the building long since fallen

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to decay. The family occupied one wing of the castle, to which everything that could make the rooms habitable had been conveyed, but even then the apartments could not be called cozy or cheerful. The best room had a carpet of Aragon leather, and on the stone floors of the others were thrown bear-skins, while the furniture was cumbersome and not at all pleasing to the eye.

The apartment which the children liked best of all was the great kitchen, which was kept very clean by old Jules, the cook, and Olympie, his wife. On the rafters were hung provisions of various kinds, hams and bags of such vegetables as will keep during the winter, with bundles of various herbs for seasoning meats and the more bitter varieties used as medicines. On the shelves against the walls were arranged the cooking utensils, the three-legged copper pots, scoured and shining like gold in the light of the fire, which, in the winter-time roared and snapped in the wide chimney and welcomed you like a good friend. In the kitchen, curled up on the old settle in the corner, the children spent many a pleasant hour. They had watched old Jules prepare so many meals it seemed to them that they, too, might be able to cook; and, indeed, they had once tried it, though with disastrous results.

When a walk in the fresh mountain air had made them hungry, they liked to see old Jules take a plucked fowl and put it on the spit above the

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blaze; this he turned with great care until it was of a fine golden brown and sent forth an appetizing odor. The bird was served at table with a sauce made of lavender or caraway seed, which would not be relished to-day, for appetites, like a great many other things, have changed during the last three hundred and fifty years. No, Jules would not to-day, perhaps, win the *cordon bleu*, which means blue ribbon, but he was very proud of his feats as a cook. He could make a pie of blackbirds, though I do not know that he ever had as many as four-and-twenty for his dainty dish, and I am quite positive that the birds never sang when the pie was opened; and he could roast chestnuts in the hot ashes until they would melt in your mouth.

What wonderful stories used to be told in the evening, when Pedro, Petronilla, Jules, Olympie, Tomas the groom, Lenoir the herdsman, and some of the people from the village below sat around the kitchen fire. Tales of the *blanquettes*, or white fairies of the mountains, who roamed from peak to peak, and, pausing on the highest point, sang mournful songs; and of the gnomes who live under the ground and guard the treasures of the earth. Jules declared that with his own ears he had heard those gnomes digging under the ground, and Olympie would nod sagely and corroborate all her husband's statements, as a good wife should do.

Pedro and Petronilla were twins, and were so much alike that their Aunt Catalina often declared

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it was a mercy that they were not both boys or both girls, for in that case one might often have been soundly cuffed for a piece of mischief planned and executed by the other. They were lovely children, with straight noses and lips like coral; and old Mother Nature, after giving them large dark eyes and black brows, delicately arched, had allowed them to have golden hair, which served to enhance their beauty and to make it the more striking.

The pure mountain air made them active and healthy in mind as well as in body; they wanted to find out all there was to know about everything, and they always asked a great many questions about whatever was told them. As they never played with other children, they talked all matters over with each other, and the fact that their lives had been passed in the companionship of grown people made them wise beyond their years.

Although money was scarce in the household, there were horses in the stables, and the children each possessed one, which they had learned to ride almost as soon as they could walk, such being the custom in those days in noble families. Attended by Tomas they were allowed to ride down to the village in the valley, and sometimes several miles beyond, according to the humor of Tomas, who, having lived at the castle ever since the children were babies, was sometimes inclined to be dictatorial.

But the animal the children liked best of all was

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Tonito, a little brown donkey, with the full extent of ear allowed to his tribe. The amount of stuff this little fellow could carry was a wonder to behold. He always was taken to the woods when fagots were gathered, and came home so loaded down that, had it not been for a glimpse of the tips of two ears and four little feet, you would have said a bush was trotting along the path all by itself. Pedro had once loaned Tonito to the village cobbler, who wanted to change his place of residence from one cottage to another; and no moving van was required, even had such a thing been heard of at that time, for chairs, bedding and benches were tied to the back of Tonito, who, with great gravity and decorum, carried them from the old to the new abode.

For that period the twins were very well educated. They could read and write—an accomplishment which many of the lords and ladies of the time did not possess—and they understood French and Spanish, having practice in speaking the former language with Jules, who was a Frenchman, and the latter with Tomas, who was a Spaniard, as well as with occasional travelers who came up from Spain and down from France, and to whom the door of the castle was always open.

You might know all the modern tongues, yet you could not understand the language usually spoken in the household of Pedro and Petronilla. The great Henry of Navarre, who afterward lived in

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the same country, upon being asked, when a child, by the King of France, "Will you be my son?" replied, "*Ed que es lò pay*," which means, "There is my father," and which sounds to us like mere baby talk. So during this story we shall be obliged to translate their language and put it into modern English.

Brother François, a Franciscan friar, who belonged to a monastery beyond the village, came to the castle three or four times a week to teach the children. Their mother, and their aunt, who lived with them, greatly respected Brother François, to whom they told all their troubles and of whom they asked advice. He was very devout, and was supposed to fast a great deal, though he never seemed to be fasting when he came to the castle; in fact, none appeared to enjoy a goblet of wine and a roast fowl more than did this learned friar, whose strong white teeth certainly seemed to be made for use. He wore sandals on his bare feet, and he wore a black cowl, or hood; his long brown robe had flowing sleeves and was confined at the waist by a rope. One day, the children, unknown to their elders, bought of a peddler a shining silken cord of bright crimson, which they intended should take the place of the rope.

"He will be delighted with it!" exclaimed Petronilla. "It will be the only nice thing he has." But Brother François shook his head and smiled when they offered it to him, telling them that he

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must wear just that rope and no other girdle. Petronilla felt so bad about it that she cried, but the twins finally tied the cord about the neck of Tonito and, thus worn, it looked very well and attracted considerable attention when he went to the village.

Pedro and Petronilla considered their mother more beautiful than the pictures of the Madonna in the castle chapel. She always wore black, and, except on Sundays and fête-days, the goods of her gown was quite coarse. She often was very sad, as though thinking of some trouble in the past, but like the people in that part of the world, she could easily change from grave to gay, for her natural disposition was a joyous one, and she liked to take a bright view of things.

The person who ruled supreme in the family, and who did all the planning and the heavy scolding, was Aunt Catalina, who was their mother's aunt. Brother François more than once had told the children in her presence that their Aunt Catalina was a blessing for which they could never be too grateful; at another time he admonished them always to cultivate the spirit of patient resignation, and even to be willing to part with their greatest blessing, should it seem best to do so.

“Then,” said Pedro with considerable animation, “we are perfectly willing to give up Aunt Catalina.”

What appeared to be a twinkle shone for a mo-

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ment in the eyes of the friar; then he scolded the boy for making such a remark.

“But why do you say he should not make such remarks?” asked Petronilla, who always took her brother’s part. “You have called our Aunt Catalina a blessing more than once, and she likes to hear you say it, for she always gives you a cup of wine and something nice to eat when you talk like that. Then you say we should be resigned to part with our blessings, and Pedro tells you we could part with Aunt Catalina—for which you scold him.”

“That,” said the good friar, “is a matter which you will more fully understand when you grow older,” which was a very easy way of getting out of a difficulty.

Aunt Catalina was one of those persons who consider it their duty to object to things. This admirable old lady was convinced that, had she been consulted when the universe was created, there would have been many changes for the better. She objected to children and often remarked that people should have been sent down from Heaven full-grown, for children were always under one’s feet when not wanted and never to be found when really needed; they required constantly to be patched and darned, and their usefulness was out of all proportion to the size of their appetites. When her temper was keyed to an unusually high pitch, and when she was particularly exasperated with the

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children, she would remark that people whose veins contained two kinds of blood would never come to any good. This assertion greatly puzzled the twins, who wondered what their blood was like, and resolved, when they cut or scratched themselves, closely to examine the result.

One day when Pedro was playing with Jules' knife, which he had taken from the shelf where it belonged, he accidentally cut his finger on the sharp blade. Hastily replacing the knife where he had found it he joined his sister outside and the two examined the small wound with intense interest.

"My blood is just red; there is not another color with it," finally remarked Pedro in a decisive tone. "From what Aunt Catalina said, I thought some of it must be yellow or blue."

"Perhaps it is only red in our hands and arms," suggested his sister. "All the rest of it may be of another color. I will tell you what I think about it," she went on thoughtfully; "you remember when Aunt Catalina made you that warm doublet last winter, and there was not enough cloth to finish it, she pieced out the sleeves with goods of a lighter shade. Now I believe that when the good God made us there was not enough material that matched, and we had to be pieced out."

"But why should the material have been scarce just for you and me? I do not think it was fair," returned the boy not unreasonably.

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"Do you not see? There were two of us which the good God was obliged to make at the same time, else we could not be twins."

"Then it seems to me that it would have been easier to have given you all the red blood and me all the yellow, or whatever the other color is," returned her brother reflectively.

"Then we should not have been alike," said Petronilla.

This explanation did not satisfy the boy. It seemed at best to have been a poor arrangement, and he mentioned the matter to his mother one evening when Aunt Catalina was safely out of the way in her own room.

"Mother," said he, "why is it that our aunt reproaches us for having two kinds of blood? Is it anything we can help or should be ashamed of?"

Their mother pushed her embroidery frame aside, drew the children toward her, and, putting an arm about each of them, said: "There is nothing you can help and naught to cause you shame. The worst blood that courses through your veins comes from your mother."

"Then, if that be the worst, the best should make me a king!" cried her son.

She kissed him on the forehead. "Son of my heart, my true little knight!" she murmured. "No," she continued, "you are not a king, but you are of noble blood. Your name, Velasco, suggests little to you, but out in the world it is known as an

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illustrious Spanish name, being that of the hereditary Constable of Castile, and your great-grandfather enjoyed the favor and confidence of Ferdinand and Isabella. As your curiosity seems to be excited, I will tell you the history of my life."

Then she told them how the Kingdom of Navarre used to extend over the Pyrenees into Spain, and that the Spanish monarchs, not contented with the discovery of that wonderful New World over the seas, with banishing the Moors and hacking up the Jews, must also appropriate the little country of Navarre.

"At that time," said their mother, "my father was a goldsmith in the city of Pamplona. After the surrender, which was made by our weak king without a word, the city was filled with Spanish soldiers. These usurpers I was taught to hate; but during the fair, which is held there every year in honor of Saint Fermin, I beheld a Spaniard who filled my heart with love instead of detestation. To my eyes he was as handsome as an Adonis, and he was so merry, so light-hearted, and so kind, that I prayed to Saint Joseph that, should a husband be given me, he should be like the youth who filled my thoughts. But when I learned that he was the younger son of the great Velasco family, esteemed and honored by the king and queen, I felt that I must put all thoughts of him from my mind, for I, you know, was the daughter of a merchant, and must mate with one of my own

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station. But Hernandez declared that for him no barrier existed; yes, Hernandez was like that; he heeded no voice but the voice of the heart. He forgot the beautiful and gracious ladies of the court and thought only of me."

Her eyes became dreamy and her lips curved into a smile, as though she still felt the joy of it all.

"But my father was proud, in his way," she went on, "and he said that no daughter of his should enter a family where she was not welcome, or mate with one of a race we looked upon as our foes. So Hernandez stole me from my father in the night. We ran away together and were secretly wedded. My husband was disinherited and possessed nothing but this ruined estate, which came to him from his mother. There surely was a curse upon us because we disobeyed our parents. After two short happy years, Hernandez was killed while hunting, and I was left alone in this bleak world with my two babies!"

She buried her face in her hands and the children slipped to a window-seat in the farther end of the room, where they conversed in whispers.

"But I don't yet understand about the two kinds of blood," said Pedro.

"I do," said his sister; "our father was noble, you know, and our mother had just goldsmith's blood in her veins, while our Aunt Catalina has no blood at all to speak of."

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"I suppose not," returned Pedro. "I wonder if our father ran away with Aunt Catalina, too?"

"Oh, no," replied Petronilla confidently, "why should any one want to run away with her? It would be so much more natural just to leave her alone and go very far away in the other direction."

"Do you know what I heard Jules say to Olympie about her one day, when they thought I was not listening?" asked Pedro.

"No, tell me about it," said Petronilla, glancing uneasily toward the door, lest the subject of their conversation should suddenly appear.

"Olympie wondered why a brisk, industrious woman like Aunt Catalina had not married, and Jules said it was because she had too much pepper in her nature. He said that everybody should be made of honey, starch and pepper. The honey is to make them agreeable and pleasant, and there should be a good deal of it. There should be starch enough to make them keep impertinent people at a distance, and there should be just a dash of pepper to make a bit of temper; for a person without a temper, he said, amounts to nothing. Now Jules said that in Aunt Catalina's case all the honey had been left out and there was a good deal of starch and an awful lot of pepper."

Their mother now joined them at the window; she had regained her self-possession and was calm as usual. "Come, my children," she said, "I wish to show you something."

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She led the way to her room and lifted the lid of a large chest which stood by the bed, and which the children often had attempted to open, but had always found locked. Their mother now took from it a velvet doublet, embroidered with gold and trimmed with a row of small gold buttons down the outside of the sleeves; there was also a man's velvet cloak and a pair of gold spurs.

"These were worn by your father," she said, "and here is his sword, the finest that could be made in Toledo." She drew from its sheath the slender, shining blade and bent it into a curve. Pedro held his breath lest it should be broken, but it regained its former shape unharmed. Then she took up a dagger, the handle of which was set with jewels, glimmering and glowing in the firelight.

"There was a time," said Señora Velasco, "when I thought of the jewels in this dagger and of what they might bring. But the weapon was an heirloom of the Velasco family and I could not bear to part with it. I believe now that it will not be necessary to sacrifice it, unless some unexpected misfortune should befall us. And so my son shall have the dagger as well as the sword wielded so bravely by his father."

Pedro's eyes sparkled; that splendid sword, that glistening dagger, would be his own. How he wished he could begin to wear them this minute!

Petronilla was beginning to feel somewhat forlorn and to wish that something could be found for

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her, when her mother took an ivory box from the chest, saying: "And this one day shall belong to my Nilla."

The little girl gave a cry of delight as she lifted from it a long chain set at intervals with jewels which glowed a deep red. Attached to it was a round gold ball about the size of a walnut, beautifully carved, and showing a number of holes from which emitted a faint, though delightful, odor.

"This pomander-box belonged to the Countess de Velasco, your grandmother, and is the only souvenir your father possessed of her, for she died when he was a child. The perfume it contains was made by the ladies of the Velasco family, and was their secret, but I know how it was put together and just the quantity of herbs and spices necessary to yield that delicious fragrance, which many tried to produce and failed. So when my Nilla is a young lady she shall wear this ornament and enjoy the fragrance that distinguished the ladies of her family."

Petronilla threw the chain about her neck and played with the ball, swinging it back and forth. "Oh, let me begin to wear it right away!" she pleaded.

"Child of my heart! of what are you thinking? Such an ornament on a small girl is out of the question."

From the bottom of the chest their mother took a gown of yellow satin and a black lace mantilla.

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"It was thus I dressed on fête-days and when there was a ball in Pamplona," said she. "And there were ornaments of gold for my neck and my arms, for my father did not stint me."

"How happy it must have made you to wear such a beautiful gown!" cried her daughter. "Put it on, mother."

"No, no; that would be foolish."

"Oh, please, mother, let us see you as you used to look," pleaded Pedro.

"Very well, naughty ones, but the gorgeous color will make your mother look older and more faded,"—and she threw it over her arm and left the room.

After a while there appeared a lady whom the children, had they not known beforehand of the change of costume, would have had difficulty in recognizing. The soft, shimmering satin fell about her in graceful folds; her little feet were encased in slippers of the same color and, twisted about her fine head and shoulders, were the folds of the mantilla.

"Oh, mother, you are as lovely as a queen!" exclaimed Pedro. A remark which, though intended as the finest of compliments, was not strictly a stupendous one; for queens are not necessarily beautiful.

Señora Velasco laughed gaily at her son's pretty speech, the sadness occasioned by recollections of the past was forgotten and she was as merry as a

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young girl. "How light-hearted I used to be, and how I used to dance!" she said.

"Show us, mother," said Petronilla, handing her a pair of castanets.

Señora Velasco began to hum a soft and dreamy tune, and, clicking the castanets, she swayed now this way, now that, her feet moving in and out in measured rhythm, her eyes beaming, her lips smiling, a picture of grace and beauty; for, after all, she was but twenty-seven, which is not so very old.

The children, catching the contagion, joined their mother, and the three were merrily tripping the seguidilla when a harsh voice at the door exclaimed: "Pepa! What nonsense is this?" It was Aunt Catalina who stood in the doorway, with her hands raised in astonishment.

"We are rejoicing in our two kinds of blood," laughed Pedro, and his mother, recovering from her momentary confusion, said: "I have told the children of the illustrious family to which they belong, and no more shall you speak to them, Aunt, of their mixed blood, as if it were a reproach to them. You are prone to taunt them because you envy them; for you know that while your family and mine is of humble origin, my children belong to one of the noblest houses of Castile, which has for its motto, 'Before rocks were rocks the Velascos were Velascos.' "

And for the first time since she had learned to talk Aunt Catalina had absolutely nothing to say.

CHAPTER II

A VISITOR TO THE CASTLE

At the close of one summer day the children sat on the stone seat of the window on the stairs and watched the sun play tricks with the snow-capped peaks opposite. Old Sol had been smiling brightly all day, and was in a very good humor, so he threw a mantle of rich crimson over the peaks; then, as if repenting of this lavish expenditure of color, he faded it out to a pale pink; then, turning sulky, he robbed the mountains altogether of their tint of rose, giving them a cold blue instead, which afterward would disappear in the mists of twilight.

The twins did not watch for this last transformation, for on the road which wound along the side of the mountain to the castle, they noticed two men riding side by side. Visitors were not so frequent as not to attract attention, and the children wondered who these men could be.

"The one on the donkey is Brother François," said Pedro, when the riders had approached nearer. "I should know him at any distance; but the gentleman with him is no one we ever have seen."

"Well, at any rate, it is no one who could harm



The children, catching the contagion, joined their mother

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us, for in that case Brother François would not be with him," observed Petronilla.

Aunt Catalina came down the staircase and paused to gaze at the new-comers, who by this time had stopped at the gate. The stranger, dressed in a black riding-suit, was a stout, elderly man with white hair, who dismounted in a leisurely manner, as one who feels the weight of his years.

"He is very old, very plain and very cross," remarked Petronilla, who always made up her mind instantly, and expressed her opinion immediately afterward.

"He is nothing of the kind," said Aunt Catalina. "He is a fine personable gentleman. I am going to change my gown and put on my new cap."

"Let us run down and find out who it is," said Pedro.

But their aunt gripped each of them by the arm. "You will do nothing of the kind," she cried. "Fancy a gentleman come to pay us a visit and being greeted at the gate by a couple of children, who come tumbling down the terrace like sheep rushing from the top of the mountain. Stay where you are until you are sent for,"—and she withdrew to her chamber to make the necessary changes in her toilet.

"Perhaps it is some one who wants to marry Aunt Catalina," said Petronilla, who was fond of romantic stories. "Do you not remember the story Jules tells of the princess in the castle who let down

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her hair so the prince could, by holding on to it, climb up the wall?"

"Aunt Catalina's hair is not long enough to reach over the window-sill," returned her brother. "You think everything is going to be like a fairy story."

The twins were resolved to learn all about the stranger as soon as their aunt had gone down stairs, but they were obliged to wait for some time, for her toilet was not made in a moment. When she reappeared they saw that not only had she changed her gown and cap, but that she wore about her neck a string of gold beads which never were seen except upon great occasions.

No sooner had Aunt Catalina disappeared down the stairway than the children ran down the back way, well knowing that all kinds of news by some unknown method is wafted almost immediately from the drawing-room to the kitchen. There they found Olympie plucking a pair of fowls so rapidly that the feathers flew in every direction, while old Jules, half-demented between his anxiety that the fire should be just right for the roasting of the fowls, and his desire to be at work on his pastry, was running wildly back and forth from the kitchen to the pantry.

It would be useless to ask any questions of Olympie, for she was always cross when she was busy, and always silent when she was cross; but Jules was always in a good humor.

"Tell us all about it, Jules," coaxed Petronilla.

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"Who is the strange gentleman who came just now? Has he come to marry Aunt Catalina?"

The old man stared at her for a moment; then he dropped the bellows which he had seized to blow the fire, and, placing his hands on his fat sides, he laughed until the tears came.

"Go on with your work," said Olympie. "If you stand there guffawing like a clown this supper will not be ready before midnight."

Her husband gave vent to a ho! ho! ho! which had been ready to explode when she began to speak; then dropping on his knees he again went to work at the fire. "No, my child," he replied, as he worked away, "it is no one who comes to be married, for I suspect that he has a wife and family already, and perhaps even grandchildren. It is Monsieur de Beaurepas, who is a physician at Pau, and he comes to see the Señora Velasco upon a very important matter, which he will reveal to her after supper. He has traveled all day and is very tired, for gentlemen of his age and of his weight can not endure the fatigue which can be borne easily by younger men. Brother François has long known him, and he says that he is a very distinguished physician and has made some cures that are little short of miraculous."

"But no one here is ill," said Pedro.

"No, thank heaven, no one ever is ill in this house! And it is not to visit the sick that he is here. Ere long we shall know the object of his visit."

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Olympie was now polishing a silver dish, which never had been used since the children could remember; then she filled it with fresh almonds, which in their outside shells resembled withered green peaches. Jules muttered something about preparing a sweetmeat, which they never had tasted, and the children realized what a fine and splendid thing it is to have company, guests who are of sufficient importance to make necessary the preparation of all sorts of good things. They wished that such visitors would arrive at the castle every day in the year.

But the question which now agitated the twins was, would they be allowed to come to the supper-table or would they be sent to bed? Their anxiety regarding the matter was so great as to be almost painful. They asked Jules what he thought about it.

"That," said the old man, beginning to beat a dish of eggs with a whack, whack, whack that almost drowned his voice, "is a question difficult to answer. Taken separately the señora would say 'yes'; but your aunt would say 'no'; approached when they are together your aunt's influence would be felt and it would be 'no'. And there you have it."

The children ran away in search of their mother. She was in the drawing-room but, alas! so was their aunt. Both were waiting for their guest to emerge from his apartment. Brother François sat by a

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table, reading his breviary by the light of a bronze lamp, shaped like a sauce-boat.

“Oh, mother,” cried Petronilla, “can we not go to the supper-table to-night?”

“What an idea!” exclaimed their aunt, before their mother could reply. “This gentleman is accustomed to be about the court and to see only great people. He even has dined in the queen’s banquet-hall, and what would he think to be placed at the table with two hungry children?”

“But we will not act hungry and he will not know that we are,” said Pedro. “Besides, I should not wonder if he is hungry himself; he would be if he knew what we are going to have. Jules is preparing a pair of fowls that are going to be delicious and a meat pastry and something that is going to be all sweet and crusty and—”

Pedro was interrupted by a crash. It was the prayer-book of Brother François, which had fallen to the floor, and which the friar hastily regained, and began to peruse with renewed assiduity.

“No matter what we are going to have,” said Aunt Catalina acridly, “you are not coming to the table. It is out of all reason, and let us hear no more about it.”

Unfortunately, neither of the children was perfect, but of the two, the temper of Petronilla was perhaps the more fiery. In the composition of this small girl nature had not been niggardly in the matter of pepper.

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"Aunt Catalina," said she, "if this gentleman is accustomed to dining only with great people, it is you who should stay away from the table; for you are not of noble birth, while we are Velascos."

"My daughter," said her mother, "you are impertinent, and for this you shall be punished. You shall have a supper of porridge and milk, and then you must go to bed. Your brother may come to the table. Put on your best doublet, my boy; the one which has the fine lace at the neck and in the sleeves. And now leave the room, both of you."

Petronilla sobbed bitterly as they sat on the stairs together. "I knew you would catch a scolding," said her brother; "why did you not let me manage it?"

"You were managing it and you were doing it all wrong," she retorted.

"Well, you might have known that our mother would punish you for speaking to Aunt Catalina in that fashion; she has no pity for us when we are impertinent. I don't see anything for you to do but to take your porridge and milk and go to bed."

"I won't eat such a supper! I hate porridge and I hate milk, and I wish that old man had come to marry Aunt Catalina and to take her to the moon."

"She would snuff out the moon if he should take her there, she is so stingy about lights," observed Pedro.

His sister laughed a little at this conceit, but soon returned to the subject of her grievance.

A VISITOR TO THE CASTLE

"To think of all of you sitting around the table, and all the lights going, and perhaps stories being told, and I all alone in my room in the dark!"

"Tell me, Nilla," said her brother, "would it make you any happier if I should eat porridge and milk and go to my bed when you go to yours?"

The little girl saw that her brother was willing to make a sacrifice for her sake should she demand it, and, though the old adage declares that misery loves company, she was not selfish enough to permit him to do as he suggested. "Oh, no, I should be all the more wretched if you did that," she replied.

"I know what I can do," said Pedro, seized with a brilliant thought. "I will manage some way to bring up to you a piece of everything we have. Jules will help me, I know. But you will be obliged to wait for some time, for I expect it will be quite late when we are through."

"I dare say I can wait, though it will be difficult."

"But Aunt Catalina passes this way to go to her own room,—she will see the light under the door," said Pedro thoughtfully.

"Then I will eat without a light. I can find my mouth on the darkest night. But, brother, be sure to give heed to all that is said in order to tell me about it. I am so anxious to know what brings this stranger to our house."

"I will tell you everything."

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"Then I will go to my room, and, Pedro, if I should be asleep when you come up, you must waken me, even if you should be obliged to throw a cup of water in my face." And her brother agreed to this violent method should it be necessary.

When alone in her own little room Petronilla's mind continued to dwell upon her troubles. She wondered if there existed a more unfortunate and more abused person than herself. Señora Velasco was not her own mother, she was sure of it, for no mother could treat her child with so much cruelty. Pedro, of course, was her own child; her petted child, while Petronilla was an orphan picked up somewhere in the valley, and, consequently, misused. That she and Pedro could have different mothers, and at the same time be twins, was a weak link in her chain of reasoning, which she scornfully ignored; for when we are bubbling over with self-pity, and are determined to be thoroughly miserable, we are anxious to enjoy that pleasing pastime to its fullest extent.

As she was thus gloomily reflecting upon her woes Petronilla heard something come "chug!" against the window. She had figured that by this time the fowls must be served, and perhaps this was a signal from Jules to let down a string and draw up a portion for herself, as he once had done when Aunt Catalina had locked her up in disgrace. Yes, it must be dear old Jules, who, realizing how

A VISITOR TO THE CASTLE

hungry she was, had adopted this method to let her have her supper at the same time the others were enjoying theirs.

She went to the window and in the moonlight saw something on the ledge outside. It was not a piece of a bird which she thought at the first glance that Jules might have been able to convey to her; it was a whole bird,—a live one with feathers on. It was a young owl that must have been “out for a lark” and lost his way.

Petronilla opened the casement cautiously—it opened like a door and not as windows open nowadays, and, seizing young Mr. Owl, she brought him in and placed him on a chair by the lamp. He was dark and fluffy, his most prominent feature being a pair of great yellow goggle-eyes. Although she had seen owls in the distance and had heard them screech, this was the first one with which Petronilla had ever been on terms of intimacy. When she became too familiar with him he snapped at her, his beak making a sound like the click of castanets. When she moved about the room he seemed consumed with curiosity to know what she was doing, and he turned his head around so far that to her it was a matter of wonder he did not break his neck. She thought it a pity that poultry did not turn their heads in this way, for in that case Jules would not be obliged to wring their necks—which must be a disagreeable thing to do; he could simply tie them down and then run

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round and round until their heads would drop off and they would fall, victims of their own violent curiosity.

The bird took Petronilla's mind from herself and restored her to good humor. This is not so terrible a world after all, when all is said and done, and it would be fun to eat supper by stealth. So she tied her queer visitor to the leg of her chair, in order that he might not wander about at his own pleasure, and as her lamp was becoming dim for lack of oil she turned it out and threw herself on the bed, not to sleep, but to wait for Pedro; and in less than five minutes she was in the land of dreams.

CHAPTER III

THE OBJECT OF THE VISIT

Petronilla was wakened by a flash of light across her eyes, which caused her suddenly to sit up in bed. There stood her brother holding a light; and with him was Jules holding a tray which he placed in her lap.

“Hist!” he whispered; “there are those who have the eyes of a lynx and the cunning of a fox, and a lady of our acquaintance is not yet gone to her room.” Pedro carelessly had left the door open and Aunt Catalina’s heels could be heard clicking on the stone floor of the hall. In less time than it takes to tell it Jules had closed the door noiselessly, and, snatching up a fur rug, had thrown it across the crack beneath.

“And now,” he said triumphantly, “we can talk as much as we like, for these walls are too thick to allow the sound of our voices to get beyond them. And do not allow your conscience to trouble you regarding your mother. She saw us as we were bringing the tray and she turned away her eyes and said nothing.”

Petronilla enjoyed the meal, which was a rich one for a small girl at that hour of the night, but

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she never had been ill in her life and had no fear of indigestion.

Old Jules, who seemed to be very happy and somewhat excited, kept up a running stream of talk. "Ah, it has been a great evening, a grand occasion!" he cried, rubbing his hands together joyously. "Olympie and I waited at table just as if there had been a score of servants in the kitchen. 'Allow me, Señora, to compliment you upon your cook,' said Monsieur de Beaurepas, not knowing that it was the cook who was at that very moment pouring his wine. But I know how to be grave and dignified, I should hope; and not the flicker of an eyelash betrayed me, though I was ready to burst with laughter. And monsieur goes on: 'I am told that the young Dauphiness of France, Catherine de' Medici, has brought new notions and new dishes from her own country; perhaps your chef is from Paris and has learned some of them.'

"'My cook is a Frenchman,' said the señora, with a twinkle in her eyes, 'but he came to Béarn before the death of Louis the Twelfth. Consequently he knows nothing of France under the present reign.'

"'Then it can be nothing but inspiration, pure inspiration,' said monsieur, helping himself to some more of the pastry. Pretty soon he asked, 'Pray, Señora, what do you call these brown, crisp and delicious little cakes?'

"The señora looked helpless at this question, for

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she did not know, and I said very low, and very respectfully, 'If Monsieur will permit, I can give him the information he desires.' Then he lifted his goblet against the light with the air of one who appreciates good wine and said, 'Go on, my good man.'

"The cakes which are so fortunate as to please Monsieur are called *feuillantines*," said I. "The cook learned to make them in France in his youth, but never had made them since until inspired to do so by the presence of Monsieur in the château."

"Never in my life have I made so neat a speech, and Monsieur de Beaurepas was pleased, for he said, 'When I take my leave, I shall not forget a *douceur* for the cook and also one for yourself.'"

"But you can not take both, you know, Jules," said Pedro, who had opinions of his own about what was upright and strictly honorable. "There is only one of you, you see."

"You talk like a baby!" cried the old man. "Did I not make two of myself this night? Did I not produce a most delightful repast as cook, and did I not serve it neatly and expertly as waiter? Indeed, I think the *douceur* should be quadrupled!"

"But you have not told me why Monsieur de Beaurepas is here," said Petronilla, putting a stop to the argument. "I suppose he came for some other purpose than to pay compliments to Jules?"

"I was waiting for you to ask that question," said her brother, "and I was going to make you guess.

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Now tell me, who do you think is coming to live with us for a whole year, perhaps more?"

"Somebody to teach us?" she asked, her countenance falling.

"Certainly not; we have that and too much of it from Brother François."

"Monsieur de Beaurepas?"

"No, indeed; I should not wonder if a good many people will die, because he has left them to come here. But it is some one from the court."

"Not the Queen of Navarre!" cried his sister, in her excitement dropping one of the celebrated *feuillantines*.

"Now that is foolish; but I could not expect you to guess, for it is some one of whom you never have heard. It is the young Marquis de Talmanges."

"But why is he coming here?"

"For his health."

"But why must he do that, when Monsieur de Beaurepas can cure everything?" asked Petronilla logically.

"He can cure everything and that is why he proposes to cure the young marquis, which he does by sending him here," interrupted Jules. "You must know that a great physician does not administer medicines with his own hands. He says to his patients, 'Take this, or that,' or 'Go there, or there,' and they obey him. As what the Marquis de Talmanges most needs is large doses of fresh air, pure

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and sweet from the mountains, he is ordered to come here to get it."

"It will not be pleasant for us to have a sick gentleman in the house; we shall have to be very quiet," grumbled Petronilla.

"But he is such a very young gentleman," said Jules. "He is but a year older than yourselves. You see, it is this way: the young marquis is the second heir who has been born to his house. His older brother was pampered and dosed until he died. When this one was born he was sent away to be reared by a lady in Nérac, who had been a governess in the family and who, being quite old, thought that the main object in life was to keep very warm. She kept him in a room where there always was a fire; she kept all the doors and windows closed, all the cracks stopped and the walls hung with arras to shut out every breath of air. And the baby was muffled and wrapped from the tips of his toes to the top of his head. The boy lived with her until his parents died, then his grandmother, the old Marquise de Tallanges, took him away and sent for the good Monsieur de Beaurepas. 'What shall be done with him, Doctor?' she asks. 'Send him to the mountains and let him stay out of doors as much as possible for a year,' says the doctor.

"Then Monsieur de Beaurepas wrote to Brother François and asked if he knew of any one hereabouts who would receive the young marquis, and

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Brother François advised him to come and consult Señora Velasco, who has plenty of room in her château and whose own children are pictures of health. He agreed to come, and I fancy he had a pretty large fee for it, too, and Brother François met him on the way and brought him here. It would appear that the House of Tallanges is very rich and that they will pay royally for all they receive. But, although she is glad to lay by a little fortune for her children, it was the thought of being the means of curing a sickly child that moved the heart of the señora.

"The marquis is to have the suite of rooms facing the east for himself and his servant and his grandmother, when she cares to visit him!"

"Those rooms!" cried Petronilla. "Why, they are almost bare!"

"All that will be remedied," replied old Jules, "for furniture and hangings will be sent within a very short time. And this arrangement will bring better times to this house and will put many a *douceur* into the pocket of old Jules."

"I suppose you will try to make the marquis believe there are two of you in order to double your money," remarked Pedro with a grin.

"Of course not," returned the old man in an injured tone. "You will harp for ever on what I said to-night. But if there was any harm in it, may Satan come with the wings of a bat and fly away with me!"

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He took a backward step in his earnestness; there was a flutter of wings and, turning, Jules beheld, looking out at him from the shadows on the floor, two great, staring eyes which seemed to him to blaze like live coals. Believing that Satan had taken him at his word and had lost no time in accepting his invitation, Jules uttered a shriek of fear, called on his favorite saints to protect him, and jumped clear over the chair to which was tied the owl which had so frightened him.

"What in the world is the matter, Jules?" asked Pedro. "Has something bitten you?"

Petronilla, who was laughing so hard as to be in danger of choking, explained the arrival of her feathered visitor, which her brother examined with great interest.

His fright had thrown Jules into a bad humor. "There never is any telling what you will do next," he grumbled. "I should not be surprised at any time to find your room filled with wild beasts from the mountains. Do you not know that to have a bird fly into your room is very unlucky? It means a death under the roof, that is what it means,"—and he crossed himself.

"That is what you said a long time ago when a swallow flew through the kitchen," said Petronilla, "and no one has died. Besides, the owl did not come in of his own accord; he was on the ledge and I brought him in."

"Well, let him out again. We will not court bad

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luck when such good times are upon us." So saying he untied the cord, carried the bird to the window and let him go out into the night. And perhaps Mr. Owl entertained his mother in her aery home with an account of the strange beings he had met down yonder in the old castle, and of one whose screech could rival anything she could do in that line.

Their visitor left the castle at an early hour on the following morning. Jules accompanied him to the gate, outside of which stood Tomas, holding the doctor's horse.

Monsieur de Beaurepas took two shining pieces of silver from his pocket and dropped them into Jules' willing palm. "One is for yourself, my good man," he said, "and the other is for that very excellent cook."

"A thousand thanks, Monsieur," returned Jules with great gravity. "I shall spend mine for a pair of Sunday hose. The cook, being of a saving turn of mind, will put his by for a rainy day." He unbarred the gate and the visitor passed through. Carefully closing it again, the old cook, as he walked toward the house, winked at a swallow that was flying overhead.



Believing that Satan had taken him at his word, Jules uttered a shriek
of fear

CHAPTER IV

THE ARRIVAL OF THE LITTLE MARQUIS

After the visit of Monsieur de Beaurepas nothing was talked of in the old castle but the little marquis and the changes which his coming would make in the household.

"He will not want to play with you two, that is certain," said Aunt Catalina. "He is accustomed to being in the company of gentle-mannered children, little lords and ladies in fact, who do not slip out of the house and try to ride their horses down the very cliffs, acting altogether like the savages discovered by the Admiral Columbus across the seas. The young marquis will be greatly shocked at your manners."

"Monsieur de Beaurepas said he is to eat a supper of porridge and milk as we do, and that he is to stay out of doors as much as possible," said Pedro; "so while he is here he will not be so very different from us."

"He will know how to behave himself wherever he is," retorted his aunt. "Whether he is riding his horse or eating his frugal supper he will ever be a little gentleman, and you must try to be like him and to copy as nearly as you can his gracious ways.

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As he is to be here at least a year, you may in that time learn something of deportment."

"I wonder what he will look like," mused Petronilla. "I suppose he will resemble an angel."

"I have not a doubt of it," responded Aunt Catalina.

Before many days pack-mules arrived, bearing furnishings for the east rooms, and the old beds with their moth-eaten hangings were transformed into princely couches with curtains of silk, while many a luxury was added, the like of which the children never had seen.

Finally the great day came when the new member of the household, with his grandmother and their servants, was expected to arrive. Two more servants had temporarily been added to the castle corps, and every one was agitated, from Señora Velasco down to the new scullery maid. The kitchen was redolent of all kinds of spices, and old Jules expected the supper to be one of the triumphs of his life.

The hours crept on. Señora Velasco had donned her one handsome gown, the children wore the costumes permitted only on fête-days, while Aunt Catalina, whose very cap seemed to bristle with expectancy, was so unusually well-dressed as to inspire awe. But alas! modes of transportation were different in those days from what they are now. At the present time we say to a friend, "You may expect me on the five-fifteen train," and the chances

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are nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand that steam or electricity will pull us into the station at the time specified. Or, if we are detained at home, there are telegraph and telephone facilities which may, in almost the twinkling of an eye, explain the cause of our non-appearance. But in the days when the Marguerite of Marguerites was Queen of Navarre, there was no telling when anybody would arrive at any place. The roads were rough, and not only had railways never been heard of, but even carriages were not in use; when going by land people traveled on horseback or in litters. To make it all the more uncertain as to whether the traveler would reach his destination, there was danger of conflicts along the way. The country was infested with robbers who were ready to kidnap, rob or murder those travelers supposed to have money and jewels.

Night came on; the castle clock clanged the hour of seven. "If they are not here within half an hour the supper will be ruined," declared Jules. But the clock ticked out the minutes and struck eight—nine. The old cook wrung his hands in despair and the family went to the table, but so great had been the nervous strain that none did justice to the fare save Brother François, who had come to the castle to give the support of his presence to the two ladies of the house upon this momentous occasion.

The children went to bed with the conviction

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that the day to which they had looked forward with such joyful anticipations had been a dismal failure. They were sure the expected guests would arrive in the night and that they would be denied the delightful experience of watching their coming.

The next morning they were pleased to learn that the marquis and his grandmother had not yet appeared; and then followed a repetition of the previous day, of wearing their best clothes, watching every moment from the windows, and being keyed up to the wildest pitch of expectancy. The old clock ticked off the minutes and clanged the hours just the same, and the sun sank out of sight after tinting the mountain-tops; night came on and the owls hooted, while Jules tore his hair and vowed that this state of affairs was enough to drive a man out of his wits. Here he was preparing meal after meal for the nobility, and no nobility to eat his delicacies; nobody even appreciating them but a Franciscan friar, who, perhaps, ought to be fasting.

Aunt Catalina was sure the expected party had been assassinated by highwaymen, and even Brother François began to look uneasy, though his anxiety did not affect his appetite.

The twins had arranged with each other that, as soon as the marquis and his suite should be seen in the distance, they would contrive to evade the eye of their aunt and view the coming of the strangers

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from the limbs of a pear-tree which stood in one corner of the grounds.

Toward sunset of the third day, as the children stood by the staircase window, their aunt paused in passing to say: "You need look no longer; they never will come. I feel it; and when I feel a thing it always comes out just that way. Those people have been murdered. There never is to be any luck for this house. Just as we have prepared for a comfortable little income and have gone to some expense to arrange for the Marquis de Tallanges, he and everybody connected with him must get themselves killed! Precious little do those lords and ladies care for us! Everything going to waste in the kitchen and here they are swept out of the world as if we were of no consequence whatever!"

The twins might have asked their aunt why it was that the expected visitors should have had no consideration for themselves, even if it had been their intention to flout the Velasco family by allowing themselves to be assassinated; but while she was speaking their bright eyes had observed in the distance a procession at the end of the road that came zigzagging up the mountain. Did they mention this fact to their aunt? Not they! They exchanged glances like a flash; then they walked down stairs with great deliberation, and, once outside, they ran like a pair of mad things, and with the agility of squirrels climbed the pear-tree. This performance was not calculated to keep their best

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clothes in spick and span condition; but who cares for clothes in such a thrilling moment?

They saw two litters carried by horses. At the side of the first one rode a man with a woman on the pillion behind him. This couple proved to be the valet of the marquis and his grandmother's maid. Five horsemen followed the second litter, and last of all came a mule loaded with baggage. The first litter was curtained with crimson silk; the four rods which supported it being gilded and surmounted by plumes; the second, equally ornate, was hung with silk of a deep shade of yellow.

Such a splendid procession coming on a visit would agitate most people, and it is no wonder that the Velasco twins felt that the ten years of their lives had brought nothing which could remotely be compared to the sight they now were beholding. But the most puzzling and bewildering sight was yet to come. The occupants of the litters could not be seen, but from between the curtains of the second one was thrust a head, the sight of which came very nearly causing the twins to drop from the pear-tree in amazement. It was such a small head, no larger than a man's closed fist, and it wore a red cap with a large swinging tassel. The face they could not distinctly see, for the head suddenly disappeared behind the curtains, as if its owner had been forcibly pulled by a hand from within.

Petronilla, who was on the limb above that upon which her brother was sitting, leaned down and

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whispered: "Oh, do you suppose that was the marquis?"

"Yes, it must have been he. Who else could it be?"

"But what a tiny, withered little thing he is! And the glimpse I had of his face showed him to be almost black!"

"I dare say it is because he has been kept in a hot room for so long a time," observed Pedro. "You know a fowl on the spit always turns brown after a while."

"You do not think that the old lady he stayed with roasted him, do you?" asked Petronilla contemptuously. "Aunt Catalina says he is of the French nobility, and perhaps they all look like that."

"I am glad that we do not belong to it then," remarked her brother.

By this time the procession had reached the other side of the courtyard and the children slipped down from the tree and followed it. The mystery of the strange creature in the second litter was now solved. A boy climbed out of it, dragging by a chain a little animal wearing a red cap and coat, which the twins afterward were told was a monkey. It was the first one they ever had seen. From the same litter was taken a cage containing a parrot of gray plumage, and finally there leaped out a St. Bernard puppy, which stretched himself and jumped about as though delighted to reach the

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end of a tiresome journey. The young marquis had brought a small menagerie to his new home.

The valet sprang from his horse and lifted the maid from her seat, after which the two assisted the occupant of the first litter to alight. This was not a very easy task, for the marquise was very stout. Two men held aside the curtains, while the maid and the valet lifted her out as if she had been a bale of goods. She was attired in a robe of crimson velvet, which made her seem even larger than she was in reality; and, seen to-day as she then appeared, she would remind us of a comfortable parlor-sofa which had determined to walk about of its own accord.

Slim and graceful Señora Velasco and tall and gaunt Aunt Catalina welcomed their guests in the courtyard. Señora Velasco made a very pretty little speech and Aunt Catalina added a postscript which she had been conning in her mind for the past week, but which, much to her chagrin, her tongue, for once disobedient, twirled into unintelligibility.

The marquise, though a great lady, was not at all haughty, being really very good-natured. Her small eyes twinkled with good-humor, and her smile played all over her face, where it found a spacious playground. Her laugh was a chuckle and her voice was deep and sonorous. Later, when she emerged from the hands of Félice, her maid, she wore a gown of blue and yellow brocade; huge

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rosettes caught her sleeves at the shoulders, and a wide fluted collar fastened around her neck by a jeweled band stood up stiffly and scraped her ears. Pins set with gems glittered in her hair, and her fat fingers, and even her thumbs, were covered with rings. It was evident that the marquise was fond of everything that shimmered and sparkled.

Although the little marquis was not dark and withered as they had supposed him to be when they had mistaken the monkey for its master, he fell far short of the twins' ideal of what a nobleman should be. In fact, had he been the cobbler's son, or the son of the man who sold water down in the village, or any child of ordinary parentage, they would have considered him decidedly plain. He was an undersized boy, very pale and exceedingly slender. He did not seem to have grown to fit his second teeth, which, large and wide apart, appeared as if they had been made for some one else and had fallen to his lot by accident. When to this description may be added the fact that his small eyes were too close together and his hands and feet were too large for his body, it easily may be seen that this sprig of nobility was not beautiful, and that there was little prospect of his ever becoming particularly pleasing to the beholder.

Unfortunately, there was as much to be desired in his manners as in his personal appearance. Some of the hangings in his room happening not to meet with his approval, he pulled them down by swing-

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ing upon them, and threw some ornaments which did not please his fancy out of the window. In less than a half-hour after his arrival he had bruised his chin by a fall from the stairs and had tumbled out of one of the lower windows, narrowly escaping a broken neck.

At the supper-table the little marquis ate voraciously of anything that tempted him, though his grandmother warned him that the doctor had forbidden such indulgence.

"He shall eat what he likes while I am here," said the marquise comfortably, "for I can not deny him anything. But when I go, you, my dear Señora Velasco, will see to it that for his supper he has nothing but porridge and milk; for such are the doctor's orders."

Poor Señora Velasco sighed. She felt that the sum paid for her care of this youngster, although a generous one, would hardly repay her for the trouble that frisky individual was destined to cause her.

The twins had been banished to the background and were not presented to the marquise until after supper when, seated in a high-backed chair, she graciously asked to see the children who, reared in that atmosphere, were said to be pictures of health. Then hand in hand, and blushing very much, Pedro and Petronilla stood before her.

"What beauties! What perfect beauties!" cried the old marquise.

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Brother François mildly suggested that mere comeliness of feature was of small consequence, and added that he was pleased to say that the children had done him some credit as his pupils. They could read and write, and, besides their ability to speak French and Spanish, they knew a little Latin.

“What, the girl also?” asked the marquise in astonishment, for at that period girls were not expected to know anything but the intricate stitches of their embroidery.

“It is not essential that a girl should be educated unless she expects to fill a very exalted position in life,” observed Brother François; “but Petronilla is anxious to imitate her brother in all things.”

“What a lovely page this boy would make!” exclaimed the lady, who seemed not to have heard the friar’s reply to her question. “He would make an ideal page for me. He could write my letters, which I frankly state I can not do to my satisfaction; he could read to me and be useful to me in a thousand ways. He really must come to me. He is of a noble Spanish family, I am told, and he will have a good opportunity to make his fortune at court.”

The heart of Señora Velasco beat high with joy. It was the chance for which she had longed for Pedro, as in those days it was the custom of noble families to obtain for their young sons positions as pages to ladies of rank. The page accompanied

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the lady in her walks, he read and sang to her and made himself generally useful. Such a situation with a lady at court, where there would be an opportunity for still higher preferment as he grew older, was beyond Señora Velasco's wildest dream when planning the future of her boy.

"In a year I shall return for my grandson," said the marquise decisively, and in the tone of one who is accustomed to have her own way; "in a year or less time, and then I will, with your permission, Señora, take your son away with me. I should take him immediately, did I not think it best for him to remain here as a companion for my little Fabien."

At this last remark the thought came to Señora Velasco, "What shall I do without his companionship for myself?" and she said hesitatingly, "My son is too young to go out into the great world without his mother. He is not quite eleven years of age. If you, Madame, could wait until he is older—"

"That is nonsense," said the old lady, interrupting her. "Younger boys than he, sons of noble houses, have gone forth to seek their fortunes. The brave Chevalier Bayard was but twelve years old when he left the paternal roof with but ten crown pieces in his purse. Tell me, Señora, do you accept my proposition?"

Involuntarily her hostess turned to the friar, for she was accustomed to seek advice from Brother

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François, and she anxiously awaited his reply, hoping that he would counsel delay.

The friar bowed his head. "I have wished, as you well know, Señora, to dedicate that bright young mind to the church; to this plan you have objected; therefore you can not do better for your son than to accede to the request of Madame la Marquise."

It was a decision which, though not approved by her heart, was sanctioned by her judgment, and Señora Velasco agreed that upon her return Pedro should accompany the marquise to the court of Navarre.

The eyes of the boy sparkled and he could scarcely contain himself for joy. But there rang a wail through the room, which was as mournful as it was startling and unexpected. It was from Petronilla, who, regardless of the fact that they were entertaining a noble guest, threw herself upon the floor in an agony of grief.

"What in the name of all the saints is the matter with the girl?" asked the marquise in amazement.

"Be quiet, you misguided child!" said Aunt Catalina, dragging her niece to her feet, and giving her a shake as she did so.

"Let her alone!" commanded the marquise imperiously. "Come here, little one, and tell me what is troubling you."

After a few moments, during which Petronilla was swallowing her sobs and striving to gain com-

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mand of her voice, she replied: "My brother shall not go with you, Madame. Or, if he does, I too must go. Do you know what we are? We are twins. We have never been separated a day in our lives, and the good God does not want us to be apart, for He not only sent us into the world together, but He made us just alike."

"It is true," added Pedro soberly, "I can not be separated from Nilla. We must live and die together, Madame la Marquise, for so we have promised each other."

The marquise seemed to be very much amused, but Brother François said: "It is the duty of children to obey their parents without a question. I have taught you nothing, if not that."

"This scene must be very annoying to our honored guest," said Aunt Catalina. "Leave the room, both of you!"

"Pardon me," interrupted the marquise sharply, and in a tone which said "Keep quiet," as plainly as words could have done, "I want to hear what these children have to say. What would you do, my little girl, if I should take your brother away in spite of you?"

"I think I should die, Madame," replied Petronilla simply.

"And I, too," returned her brother with conviction. "When you offered to take me into your service, Madame la Marquise, I was glad. I was sorry to leave my mother, but a man can not always

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be with his mother. But I did not think that Nilla would remain here."

"Here is a fine state of affairs!" cried the marquise. "I do not want to break two young hearts; I am not a cruel woman."

"Pay no attention whatever to what those children say, Madame la Marquise," said Aunt Catalina, who could scarcely contain herself with anxiety lest this splendid opportunity offered Pedro should be withdrawn.

"I have a superstition about separating twins," continued the marquise, paying no more attention to Aunt Catalina than if a fly had buzzed a protest. "I have made up my mind to take that boy to court, and when my mind is made up, it never changes. But what am I to do about this girl? Child," she continued, with a fat laugh, "why were you not born a boy?"

"I wish I had been, Madame," returned Petronilla, who was not at all afraid of this good-humored old lady; "girls are of no use, anyway."

"Do not say that, do not say that," protested the marquise. "Girls grow into women, and women have done a great deal of good in the world. Think of the noble Queen Isabella, of Marguerite of Austria, and of our own splendid Queen Marguerite of Navarre, who did so much for France, and was instrumental in releasing her brother, Francis the First, from his Spanish prison. And many women who have not themselves done deeds

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of heroism have inspired men to noble acts, so let us not speak of them as if they were of no account. But, in the present case, I am sorry you are not a boy, for then I should have two pages exactly alike. But stay, a new idea has come to me. Yes, it will be fine if I can arrange it. You shall come with your brother, little one, that is certain. Your future, also, shall be provided for."

Petronilla clasped her hands together rapturously. To go to court, to see the queen, and all the great world beyond the castle, seemed too good to be true. "But, oh, what will our mother do without either of us?" she cried impulsively.

"Do not think of me, my Nilla," murmured Señora Velasco. "It is but a poor mother who is not willing to sacrifice herself for her children."

"And it is not as if they were leaving this world, my dear Madame," said the marquise, "for you certainly will see them again. Your boy will have a fine career, I am sure, and who knows what may be in store for your girl? At the court of the present king of France I once knew a little English girl. Her name was Anne Boleyn, and she was but thirteen years of age when she accompanied the French court to the famous meeting on the Field of the Cloth of Gold. She was not nearly so pretty as your daughter, yet the polish of court life won for her the heart of a king."

As Anne Boleyn had been beheaded at the command of this same king a few years before, this was

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a rather unfortunate illustration, which the marquise seemed to realize as soon as she had made it; for she hastened to add, turning to Petronilla: "And now you are happy, are you not, my dear?"

"Yes, Madame la Marquise," replied Petronilla; "only I shall be very sorry to leave our mother."

"Is there no other member of the family from whom you will regret to part, Petronilla?" asked Brother François somewhat sternly.

"Oh, yes," cried the little girl, "I shall feel very bad at parting with you, Brother François, and with the servants and Tonito."

"By Tonito, I suppose you refer to your aunt?" inquired the marquise, a little stiffly, for it was evident that she was not an ardent admirer of Aunt Catalina.

"Oh, no, Madame la Marquise," returned Petronilla; "Tonito is not our aunt, Tonito is our donkey."

The marquise concealed a smile with her hand, while Aunt Catalina said icily: "It is a peculiarity of children, Madame la Marquise, that they fail to recognize their best friends and that they never appreciate those who do the most for them."

"While that is true in a measure," replied the marquise, "children are fond of those who make them happy; and the donkey of which the child speaks is no doubt good-natured and kind to her."

In the meantime, Pedro, who was standing be-

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hind his mother's chair, was the breathless witness of a most interesting scene at the other end of the room. The little marquis, throughout the conversation above related, had been sitting on the edge of his chair and scraping the floor with his heel, making a creaking sound on the leather carpet very disagreeable to the ear,—a fact which did not cause him to desist, but induced him to scrape all the harder; for he loved noise and racket of all kinds, when he was the motive power back of it. Had Pedro acted in this manner, his mother sweetly, but firmly, would have reproved him, and his aunt would have shaken him or boxed his ears. But no one remonstrated with the marquis.

Through the door behind the marquis now came the small, grotesque figure of Maroc, the monkey, in his red coat and his red cap. He ran to his master's chair where, unnoticed, he leaped into the seat behind him. Monkeys are proverbial imitators, and this small simian was no exception to the rule. Maroc was at this moment doing a good deal of hard thinking, and his thoughts must have been pleasant ones; for he smiled, showing teeth which were by no means handsome. He had seen his master play a joke on Guillot, the valet, that morning, and he was aching to try it on his own account.

Stealthily stretching out a queer little paw, he slipped a pin from his master's fluted collar. At that period wire pins were not used on the Continent, but in their place were little skewers of

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wood like very fine splinters; they were very sharp and well adapted to fastening muslin and laces. Quick as a flash the monkey stuck the pin into his master's arm.

The marquis uttered a cry of pain which made everybody, even his rotund grandmother, jump in affright.

"What is it, my angel?" cried the old lady, trying to take him in her arms. But her grandson pushed her away, while the monkey chattered and seemed to be trying to explain. Perhaps he was saying in his own language, "I saw him do it to poor Guillot and I want him to know for himself how it feels." He had not long to chatter, however, for his master turned on him in a fury, and Maroc went out of the room so hurriedly that there was nothing to be seen but a swift flash of red.

"I'll kill him, that is what I will do!" cried the boy. "He has pierced my arm with that pin."

"I am sorry, my darling," said his grandmother soothingly, "but he does not know any better, poor Maroc!"

"He does, too! He knows a great deal more than you do," snapped her grandson. And he flung himself from the room.

"Oh, dear," sighed the marquise, as she sank into her chair again. "You can not imagine, my dear Señora, what a trial it is to travel with a monkey, a parrot and a puppy. Fabien would bring them and I could not object, for he will want

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them to amuse him while he is here. But they have annoyed me greatly. Three nights ago, when we were staying in the château of my dear friend, the Countess de Fleury, the parrot, released from his cage by my grandson, bit all the jeweled buttons from the gown my maid had laid out for me to wear that evening; he cut those buttons off as nicely as you could do it with a knife, and as they were scattered about over the floor, it was some trouble to find them, and it took Félice so long to sew them on—for the puppy had chewed up and spoiled all our thread—that I was late for the banquet given in my honor. I gave orders to Félice to whip both the parrot and the puppy, which so angered Fabien that he hid her shoes and all of mine, nor would he produce them until yesterday at noontime—which was the cause of our late arrival—for you know one can not travel without shoes. I should have scolded my grandson roundly, but the dear boy is so sensitive that I hesitated; besides, I feared he would do something still worse, for he possesses a bright, active mind, and is very quick at planning such things. But he is a dear little fellow after all, and I am quite sure that you will love him."

Her five silent listeners were united in one opinion, which was doubt of their being able to love Fabien, Marquis de Tallanges.

CHAPTER V

AUNT CATALINA DISCIPLINES THE LITTLE MARQUIS

The Marquise de Tallanges remained three days at the castle to rest from her journey.

"I shall not come again until I return to take my grandson away," she said, "for the journey is too fatiguing to be taken often by a woman of my age. But when I do return, Señora Velasco, I shall take with me not only my grandson, but your adorable twins."

"They will be ready to go with you, Madame la Marquise," replied her hostess, in a low but steady voice.

The affable old lady tipped all the servants generously, and Jules was not obliged to continue the little deception that there were both a waiter and a cook, for their guest gave him enough for two, handing him a shining gold piece, the sight of which made the old man's eyes sparkle as they had not done for two decades. She repeated her instructions regarding Fabien. He was to be taught with the twins by Brother François; he was to stay out of doors as much as possible when the weather was fair; he was to have a supper of porridge and milk, and to retire very early. Then she bade

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adieu to every one, embraced her grandson, and kissed him on both cheeks a dozen times—embraces to which he violently objected—then she took her departure with her maid and her five horsemen.

Guillot, Fabien's valet, looked mournful as the procession started down the mountain; he was sure he would be very dull in this old castle, which was so great a contrast to his customary surroundings, for, although he had not been in the midst of the gaiety of the court, he was on the fringe of it, so to speak, and enjoyed hearing of it.

"It must have made you very sad to part with your grandmother," said Petronilla, as the marquise and her servants at last disappeared in the distance.

"It did not in the least," was the reply. "On the contrary, I rejoice that she has gone away; I am going to be my own master now, and I shall do as I please. I am sick and tired of being managed by old women. She always kisses me so much, and I hate to be kissed. I want to tell you right here and now, Petronilla, that I shall hate you if you kiss me. Do not try it, for I will not have it."

"Kiss you, indeed!" replied the little girl indignantly. "Do not let the fear of such a thing disturb you for a moment. When I feel like kissing a boy, I can kiss my own brother, who is as handsome as the morning."

"Then you must think yourself handsome," he

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said sneeringly, "for you and he are as much alike as two white beans."

"I think my brother is beautiful," she returned with dignity. "If you tell me that I am like him, I can only thank you for the compliment."

The first day of her guardianship of the young nobleman was considered by Señora Velasco to be most promising. He had been told to stay out of doors, and, since to obey this command was to follow the bent of his own inclinations, no trouble resulted from it. But at supper-time there was a scene of bold and determined rebellion. When offered porridge and milk, instead of the appetizing and tempting dishes partaken of in the company of his grandmother, the marquis vowed in a loud voice that he would not touch it, demanding meats, pastry, cakes and a half-dozen viands, which were not forthcoming. His gentle guardian reasoned, coaxed, implored; it was like a dove endeavoring to influence a particularly fierce young hawk to change its manner of flight and way of living.

"Let me try it!" said Aunt Catalina, who considered herself an adept in the management of children. She was inclined to truckle to this youth. Not only his rank, but his gold, his castles and lands united to form a pleasing vision for her to contemplate,—a vision which made a halo about the rough hair of the small marquis. She would be his friend, he would adore her. As he grew older he would talk of "that dear Señorita Catalina Es-

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pinos," who had been kind to a lonely little boy; and perhaps he would send her presents, and even settle a small income upon her with the consent of his doting grandmother.

"See, Monsieur le Marquis," she said, in a wheedling tone, "Jules has brought the milk in a lovely silver jug, and the dish in which the porridge is served was once—"

"Oh, what do I care about the old jug and the dish!" interrupted the boy rudely. "It makes no difference to me if they are set with a million jewels. I can not eat silverware. And I won't have the stuff that is in them, and I will have something that I want. Bring me one of those pies full of little birds, such as we had last night for supper."

"But think of your precious health!" cooed Aunt Catalina. "A simple supper will make you grow into a strong, handsome man. Do eat it, my darling."

"Do not call me your darling, for I am not," he retorted tartly.

"Well, at any rate, eat your supper like a good boy. See, I will pour the rich, yellow milk for you myself—"

At this point something dreadful happened. Fabien took a large spoonful of the food, but he did not put it into his mouth; he threw it at Aunt Catalina, and the dish after it.

This was the last straw. It mattered not to her at this moment that he was Fabien Alexandre

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Pierre Auguste, Marquis de Tallanges, and owner of as many estates as he had names; he was a detestable small boy who had ruined, for the time at least, her gown and cap. She no longer condescended to coax him; she took him by one of his huge ears and led him from the room. He made a great many furious remarks, but it was of no use; she had full possession of his ear and he was obliged to follow his ear. Thus conducted to his room he was thrust in, the door was locked on the outside and the key was dropped to the bottom of Aunt Catalina's deep pocket.

"You shall not have one bite of supper this night!" cried Aunt Catalina, with her lips at the keyhole.

"I will, too! I am hungry and you shall let me out!" he wailed from the other side.

"A little hunger will do you good, my young friend," remarked the old lady, as with a grim smile she descended the stairs.

"Was that one of the pretty little ways you wanted us to copy, Aunt Catalina?" asked Petronilla demurely, though her eyes danced with mischief.

"Be careful," returned the old lady sourly, "or you, too, will go supperless to bed."

"But you are going to send him something to eat, are you not, Aunt?" asked Pedro.

"Not one crumb before to-morrow morning!" cried she, closing her lips so tightly and so firmly

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that only a faint line betrayed the fact that she possessed a mouth.

"But he is paying for his board, and if he gets nothing to eat he is being swindled," objected her nephew, in whose mind his mother had taken great pains to inculcate correct ideas of justice.

"It would not matter to me if he were paying a thousand crowns a minute," snapped Aunt Catalina; "he has chosen to act like a young outlaw, and he is entitled to no more respect than a *contrabandista* of the mountains. He shall be made to suffer the consequences of his outrageous conduct!"—and she marched from the room.

"But this will never do," said Pedro to his sister. "It is not only wrong, it is impolite to starve anybody but your own family."

The two went to Fabien's door. "Are you hungry?" asked Pedro through the keyhole.

"It is not your affair whether I am hungry or not," came the snarling reply.

"Then I crave your pardon for meddling with your affairs," said Pedro; and the twins went down stairs again, after exchanging a glance of indignation.

"I know he is disagreeable," remarked Pedro an hour later, "but I do not like to think that he is hungry."

"Nor I," said his sister; "let us speak to our mother about it."

Pedro shook his head. "It would be of no use;



Fabien Alexandre Pierre Auguste, Marquis de Tallanges, was obliged
to follow his ear

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she never countmands Aunt Catalina's orders." And again they returned to the prison chamber.

"We have come to ask you if you are not ready for your supper," called Pedro.

"Yes, I am, and you should know it without asking. Send me a ragout, one of those pies with little birds in it, and some of those cakes Jules makes—about a hundred, I think, and—"

"We can not send you anything but what your grandmother said you must have," interrupted Petronilla; "Jules and Olympie would not give it to us. Take off those cords that loop the hangings of your bed, tie them together and let down one end and we will tie your supper to it, and you can draw it up."

"The same kind of a supper that old dried prune wanted me to take?" asked the boy.

"You must not speak in that way of our aunt," returned Petronilla coldly. "She is not very kind to us, and we are not at all fond of her, but we never have called her a dried prune. If you want your porridge and milk you shall have it; if not, we will go down stairs and trouble you no more."

There was a short silence, then the prisoner said ungraciously: "I will throw out the end of the cord."

The twins placed a generous quantity of the despised food in a basket and tied it with great care to the end of the cord dropped from the window by the marquis, and when the basket was lowered

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the dish was in the same condition as was the platter belonging to that amiable couple, Mr. Jack Sprat and his wife.

In the meantime, Aunt Catalina's anger had cooled somewhat. Perhaps, after all, she had been too severe upon the heir of the noble House of Talmanges. She had pictured to herself the marquise on her return thanking her with tears in her eyes for the round, rosy cheeks and the improved appearance of her grandson, and starving that young gentleman was not exactly the way to make him gain flesh. So, a few moments after he had returned the basket to the twins, his captor knocked on the door and said:

"I do not wish you to go hungry to bed, my poor boy. I will send your supper to you if you will eat what has been ordered for you."

"Never!" called out Fabien with energy. "I will die and be buried before I will touch it! Nor need you send up anything else, for I will eat nothing that has been cooked in the detestable kitchen of this detestable house!"

"Really," thought Aunt Catalina, as she walked down the hall, "this is more than I had bargained for. What if he should make up his mind to starve himself to death? We should be undone. There is no denying the fact that to the nobility belongs great inflexibility of character."

The next day Fabien made no objection to the food that was placed before him, and in the eve-

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ning he took his supper of porridge and milk in the company of the twins without a word of protest.

For a short time the two boys played together without any serious clashes, Pedro generously yielding upon all occasions, because he thought the boy his inferior in strength and because he was in a certain sense a guest at the castle. But one day he felt obliged to assert himself.

"That is a fine cap you are wearing, Pedro," said the marquis tauntingly. "Fancy a cap with no ornament but an eagle's feather! See, I have a soft, waving plume in mine, and it is fastened with a jewel."

"Perhaps some day I may wear as fine a one, Fabien," replied Pedro.

"You address me by my first name," said the other haughtily, "and you must not do it. You forget who I am. My grandmother says that no one should be allowed to forget my station."

"Then you shall address me as Don Pedro de Velasco, for it is what I should be called in my father's country, as my family, too, is noble."

"On both sides?"

"No, just my father's family," returned Pedro truthfully.

"That for your family!" sneered the other boy, snapping his fingers in Pedro's face. "I am French on both sides of my house, and the only reason we are in this little country is because my mother

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was lady-in-waiting to Queen Marguerite of Navarre, who also likes to have my grandmother at court. Not only was my father of an ancient house, but my mother was of noble birth, while your mother—”

But the sentence was not finished, for the scion of a noble race received a blow from Pedro's clenched fist which sent him backward to the ground. “I am not going to pound you now,” said Pedro, sitting astride his fallen foe, “because I am so much stronger than you, and it would not be fair. But, remember, you are never to say another word against my mother or her family. And if you call me by my first name I shall call you by yours. I am not your servant, remember, or anything like it. I have seen from the first that I should have to knock you down sooner or later, and now it is done I feel better.”

Fabien picked himself up like one dazed, for, although he often had sorely needed chastisement, no one ever had before to-day dared to administer it.

CHAPTER VI

GRIS CREATES EXCITEMENT

Fabien's parrot, which hailed from Africa, was called Gris (gray) on account of his color. He was said to be a good talker, but so far during his stay at the castle he not only disdained to express his opinion upon any subject whatever, but even scorned to ask a favor from anybody, seeming, when not engaged in eating or sleeping, to be absorbed in meditation on some problem which required a very nice weighing of pros and cons. Jules had made a high wooden perch for him, which was placed in the courtyard beside the kitchen window. There, all day long, Gris thought and dozed, varying the monotony of his life by an occasional somersault and a descent to the ground when Jules placed at the foot of his perch something which tempted his appetite. In vain Jules whistled to him, petted, cajoled and threatened him from the kitchen window; not a word did Gris reply, though he sometimes hung by one foot from his perch and surveyed the old man with rolling yellow eyes.

"I am very sure this bird never has talked," said Jules one day in a tone of disgust. "It is all

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nonsense about birds' speaking, anyway,—I never heard one say a word."

"You haven't seen and heard everything that is going on in the world," returned Olympie quietly.

"No, I have not," retorted her husband, "and among other things, I have not heard birds talking like Christians,—which I believe to be nothing but a trick of the imagination on the part of those who claim to have heard them."

The days passed on and still Gris said nothing. His master, who found a good many other things to interest him, paid little attention to the bird, which Jules fed by day and put into his cage at night.

One warm afternoon when the old man, enjoying a brief respite from work, was dozing in his chair, he was awakened by a shriek of "Help! help! help!" The cry sent him out of his chair as if he had been shot from a gun; then he remained for a moment motionless in the middle of the floor, dazed and uncertain what to do. Señora Velasco had gone to the village to make some purchases and had taken Olympie and the children with her. There was no one in the house, therefore, but Jules, Guillot and Aunt Catalina. To the mind of Jules there was but one explanation of the mystery. The foppish valet had more than once expressed in the kitchen his indignation at the old lady's fondness for meddling with his affairs, and only that morning had darkly hinted his probable

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action should she continue to nag him. He would not answer for the consequences, he said,—which is a very significant threat.

“Help! H-e-l-p!” cried the voice again in more agonizing tones than before. Yes, Guillot evidently was keeping his word in a decisive and awful manner. Jules seized his wooden staff and ran up stairs with a swiftness surprising in one of his years. Without knocking, he opened Aunt Catalina’s door, for one does not stand upon ceremony when murder is being done, and he found her lying on her couch with her eyes closed. It was evident that Guillot, having accomplished his fell purpose, had fled. But it was not too late to resuscitate his victim, for she still breathed. Seizing a cup of water, Jules dashed it into the old lady’s face. The effect was surprising. She sat up instantly and at the same time gave the old man a cuff on the side of the head that made his ears ring and astonished him so much that he could only stand and stare at her.

“May I ask,” she cried, adjusting her cap and almost choking with rage, “what you mean by such idiotic and impertinent conduct?”

“Why did the Señorita cry ‘Help! help!’ at the top of her voice, if she did not want me to hasten to her aid?” asked Jules somewhat sulkily.

“I did not cry for help or anything like it,” she replied. “It is a pretext for a foolish jest on your part. For a person of your age and in your

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position it is inexcusable, and I have a great mind to discharge you this instant."

But so earnestly and in a manner so convincing did he deny all intention on his part to play a joke upon her that she was forced to believe him. "When I entered the room I thought the Señorita was almost dead," said he; "I had no idea that she was asleep."

"I was not asleep," she testily replied, for it was a statement often made by this lady that not only did she never sleep in the daytime, but that she lay awake during the greater part of the night. "I merely had closed my eyes to rest them," she added.

"Then it is Guillot, who is amusing himself at our expense."

"Let us find him then," promptly said Aunt Catalina, who never hesitated to give any culprit a bad quarter of an hour.

"Fool, fool, fool!" said the voice as they left the room.

"You will soon find out who is the fool," cried Aunt Catalina angrily. "Come here this instant, sir, and explain your conduct."

This imperious command was received in dead silence.

"Are you coming?" called Aunt Catalina sharply.

No answer.

"I shall take care that Madame la Marquise

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hears of your disgraceful trick. You shall be dismissed without a character, I promise you."

As this threat seemed to be considered by the culprit as unworthy of a reply, the old lady stalked down the stairs in quest of him, Jules following, still grasping the staff; for he felt that he owed Guillot a trouncing for the blow which the latter's folly had gained for him and which still burned on his right ear.

The voice had seemed to come from the entrance hall, but there was no one there, though in their search they even looked up the wide chimney. "He has slipped up stairs," said Aunt Catalina; and the two mounted the stairs to the east rooms. Guillot occupied a room next to that of his young master, and there on the floor they found the valet, apparently fast asleep and certainly snoring.

In his eagerness to administer what he considered a just punishment, Jules dropped the staff to the floor with a sharp clatter which caused the valet to rise to his feet.

"What is the matter?" he asked, surveying with astonishment the irate couple before him.

"Matter enough!" growled the old man, seizing the valet by the collar. "What do you mean by amusing yourself at our expense, first by crying for help and next by calling me a fool?"

"I did nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Guillot, disengaging himself from the old man's grasp.

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"Judging by the sunshine on the floor I must have been sleeping for an hour. I did not call for help and I never have called you a fool, no matter what my private opinion may have been." For Guillot was not in very good humor with Jules at that moment.

"Then who could it have been?" asked Aunt Catalina and Jules, looking at each other.

"I think I can explain," said the valet. "It is that beast of a Gris,—those are some of the words he often uses."

He had scarcely finished speaking when the cry of "Help!" repeated several times came up in ear-splitting tones from below. The three now descended the staircase and behind an archway in the main hall they found the parrot perched on the shoulder of a suit of armor, from which unusual resting place he surveyed them in a coldly indifferent, if not supercilious, manner, as if wondering why they had come to disturb him.

"He has flown across the courtyard and entered the house through the window," said Jules, eying the bird with respect, now he found that it really could talk. "Do you suppose he was afraid and wanted us to come to him?"

"No; he has not the faintest notion what he is talking about," replied Guillot contemptuously. "He will call for help when he wants his breakfast and he has said 'Fool, fool!' a hundred times when he was all by himself."

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"He may have been thinking about somebody he was acquainted with," observed Jules reflectively.

"Don't you believe it," replied the valet. "Birds haven't anything to think with. They are not intellectual like you and me."

"I don't suppose he could prepare a ragout such as I can make, nor could he curl hair as you do," said Jules; "but it is not a fact that birds do not think. You know how the blessed Saint Francis of Assisi loved birds as being, as he said, most unearthly in their nature. You know that he once preached a sermon to the birds and they listened most attentively, with their beaks open, their necks outstretched and their wings spread. He walked right in the midst of them with his robe fluttering about him, but the birds did not stir until he had given them his blessing and dismissed them, just as in church we wait for the service to be finished. And Saint Francis was sorry he had not been in the habit of preaching to birds as well as to human beings."

To this statement Guillot made no reply. Jules had related a miracle in which he as well as most people of the time believed, and if birds could understand a sermon they were even more clever than himself, Guillot thought, for he often had been puzzled at what he heard from the pulpit.

Having solved the mystery of the voice it was now time for apologies. Upon the rare occasions

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when she believed herself to have been in the wrong Aunt Catalina was not averse to admitting it, so she now expressed her regret to Jules for having cuffed him, since the old man had meant to do her a favor, and Jules asked Guillot's pardon for having grasped him by the collar, while Gris, the cause of it all, eyed the trio in sphinx-like silence.

CHAPTER VII

GUILLOT'S STORY OF THE SCULPTOR

Autumn had now come to touch the land with her cool breath and to tint the foliage with her magic brush. During the chill evenings the great kitchen was unquestionably the most attractive spot in the old castle.

Around its broad hearthstone were assembled one evening after supper Pedro, Petronilla, Fabien, Guillot, Jules, Olympie and Tomas, to which company was added the village cobbler, who had come to bring a pair of shoes for Petronilla, and the tailor's apprentice, who had come to measure the ever-growing Pedro for a new doublet. Both of these had gladly accepted the invitation of the hospitable Jules to linger and chat for an hour or two. Lastly there entered a tall man, a Spaniard, clad in the robe of a monk and carrying a pilgrim's staff, who, on his way through the mountains to the shrine of his favorite saint, had been attracted by the light from the windows and had asked permission to rest for a while before continuing his journey.

Considering himself the host, as he ever did, when in the kitchen, the old cook beamed with

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good nature; he heaped fagots upon the fire and rubbed his hands with satisfaction when the crackling flames wound about the twigs and licked them up. He roasted chestnuts in the ashes and served them hot to the company, at the same time warming their very hearts with cups of mulled wine. All enjoyed these simple refreshments save the stranger, who, with gloomy eyes fixed on the fire, waved them aside with a brief word of thanks.

"This is pleasant enough," remarked Guillot, "but for one who has lived at the court of France, the quiet of this place is enough to cause madness. For two years I was the valet of a gay young nobleman, and during that time I was in the midst of more exciting events than most men experience in a lifetime. My lord fought eight duels while I was with him, and I could not tell how many conflicts we were engaged in as we rode about the country. Then I used to accompany him to jousts and tourneys and to the entrance to the ball-room, where I often caught glimpses of the celebrated beauties of the day."

"Where is the young nobleman now?" asked the cobbler with interest.

"He was killed in the eighth duel. You may be sure he no longer exists, else I should be with him at this moment. Ah, those were glorious days! Would that I could live them over again!"

"Wait until I grow up and you shall have other days just like them, if not finer," said Fabien. "I



During the chill evenings the great kitchen was the most attractive spot

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shall fight at least one duel every day in the year and I intend to go to balls every night."

All laughed at this remark, save the stranger, who cast a disapproving glance upon Guillot as he said: "My friend, you should not speak thus in the presence of the young; and, moreover, life at court is but a fair-seeming fruit which upon near acquaintance turns to dust and ashes. Thus it is deemed by one who has seen the splendid court of Charles the Fifth in all its magnificence, who knew the empress when, in the pride of her beauty and of her royal birth, she came to share the throne of Spain, and who but a few weeks ago accompanied her poor remains to their last resting-place. There the once vain and haughty noble, looking upon that wasted form, that wreck of beauty, vowed to turn his back upon the world where pride and pomp were fleeting and where all mortal frames, whether robed in cloth of gold or fustian, alike find a resting-place in the tomb." The pilgrim rose and, bowing slightly, passed out into the night, as well as out of their lives.

"B-r-r-r!" shivered Guillot, "I am glad he is gone! His presence was like a blighting shadow."

"He was about as cheerful as a ghost," remarked Tomas.

"I know who it was!" cried the cobbler suddenly. "I heard about him from a friend of mine who is—well, who, in short, is a smuggler and who travels back and forth between this country and Spain.

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The stranger in your kitchen this night, my friend Jules, was no other than Don Francisco de Borja, the Duke of Gandia, who, having been grand *écuyer* to the late Queen of Spain, accompanied her remains to their tomb in Granada and who suddenly made up his mind to don the garb of the holy Brotherhood."

Jules was rendered speechless for the moment by the assurance that a celebrated Spanish noble had rested for a time beside his kitchen fire. He regretted that circumstances had not permitted his preparing for his guest one of the meals for which he felt he was justly celebrated.

"Because he is tired of the world," observed Guillot, "is no reason why every one else should want to become a monk."

"True," said the cobbler, "and it is no news that death claims the queen as well as the beggar."

"My notion of life," said Jules, "is that it is like a dinner. First is the soup, or childhood; next comes the delicate fish, or youth; next full manhood, with the meats and all that go with them; then we go on until we come to the sweets, when the meal is finished. Now, we can enjoy every course if we take it moderately and if we have not overeaten ourselves in the previous one; but if we are gluttonous at the meat course, we are indifferent to what follows it, and we long to leave the table."

Fabien opened his wide mouth in a yawn which

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he made no effort to conceal. "This kind of talk is tiresome," he observed, with his usual frankness. "Guillot, tell us a story!"

The valet did not feel in the least like telling a story; he would have liked better to astonish these rustics with tales of what he had seen in Paris. But he was employed to care for and amuse the little marquis and he was obliged to obey his autocratic young master. So he leaned back comfortably on the settle and began:

"There once lived in a fair city of Italy a sculptor, who was so perfect in his art that beholders, seeing the figures he chiseled, almost forgot that the pure white marble was not real flesh and blood, and they were ready to affirm that the dimpled limbs of his cherubs moved, that his graceful maidens breathed, that his saints and madonnas—"

"Stop that, Guillot!" interrupted Fabien.

"Stop what, Monsieur le Marquis?"

"I mean quit dragging along like that. Get at the story and tell it."

"Am I not telling it just as fast as I can?" returned the valet in an injured tone. "You can not plunge into the middle of a story as you would leap into a pool for a bath! Well, at any rate, the young sculptor became so spoiled by flattery, and grew to be so very vain, that there were few things in this world that were good enough for him, and he became so very particular that he would not

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talk to anybody whose features were not as regular as were those of his own Greek figures; for he said that the sight of a pug nose or of a pair of ears that stood out from the head made him positively ill. So when he wanted to express his mind about anything, as one often does, he talked to one of his own statues. He told the statue of Apollo what he thought about music, Diana how much game he killed when he went hunting, while to Venus he discoursed of beauty, and so on.

“One day a rich uncle of the sculptor died and it was found that he had left his nephew an enormous fortune upon condition that he would marry within a month from the date of the uncle’s death. The nephew wanted the money badly, for he sighed for a marble palace with dancing nymphs and such things carved over the inside of it; but he did not care to marry. He had never seen a woman as beautiful as he wished his wife to be, or anything like his ideal, in fact, so he was in despair.

“‘If I could only make a wife for myself,’ he said, ‘I should be satisfied; but to sit at table opposite a nose that had not been modeled according to my ideas of beauty, would drive me mad.’

“But there was no time to waste in lamenting. Two weeks had flown since his uncle’s death and he was no nearer marriage than before, not having seen a woman whose face he thought he could endure to look at for the rest of his natural life. It seemed to him that he never had seen so many

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plain women as were appearing just at this time, when he was anxious to find a beautiful wife; and he began to fear that as the time for selection was growing short he might be forced to take the first one who would say 'yes' or lose the fortune.

"Five days before the time had elapsed the sculptor, driven to desperation, painted a notice on a board and nailed it to a tree in front of a shop where sweets were sold and which was much patronized by the ladies. The notice stated that a famous sculptor wished to be married at once to a woman who answered the following description,—then came the color of the eyes, the shape of the nose, the height of the figure and all the perfection of beauty he demanded in the woman who should be so fortunate as to be chosen for his bride. To this was added his place of abode and the hours at which he could be found there.

"Now you must know that really worthy and beautiful women are not obliged to find a husband in this manner, and such ladies passed the notice by, holding their heads very high in the air. But all the really homely women, the soured, disagreeable and elderly maidens who never had been sought in marriage flocked to his studio, and the sight of so many irregular features almost finished the poor sculptor. They continued to pour in at such a rate that he was obliged to bar the door and to send his servant at breakneck speed to take down the sign and break it to pieces.

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“When three days of the five had gone an old man dressed in brown came to the house at twilight and asked to see the sculptor. Afraid that it might be another woman who had thus disguised herself in order to see him, the young man directed that the caller should be refused admittance; but the stranger thrust himself past the servant and without ceremony presented himself to the master.

“‘I know your wish, O gifted youth,’ he said, ‘and I know all your thoughts.’

“‘And who are you, who are so wise?’ asked the sculptor.

“‘That, you may not know, but I have it in my power to give you a wife after your own heart. With your own hands you shall fashion her from purest marble.’

“‘Of what avail would be a marble figure?’ asked the sculptor wearily. ‘It is a living wife that I must have and she must be found within two days or my noble fortune will be lost.’

“‘And a living wife you shall have. Fashion her first and then she shall be made to live afterward.’

“The sculptor’s heart beat high with hope at these words. The old man handed him a brown disk about the size of a silver crown-piece, but quite thick, and he said: ‘When you are all ready to begin your work, set a spark to this pastil, which will burn for forty-five hours, and your statue will live at the end of that time, whether completed or

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not; so beware and work rapidly, else you will have a monster upon your hands.'

"The sculptor at first thought that he would let both wife and fortune go rather than venture upon so uncertain a task, for the very thought of its possibilities made him nervous. But after his strange visitor had departed he drank a glass of ice-cold water; then selecting a block of his finest marble and putting his sharpest tools close at hand he set fire to the pastil. The disk burned with a steady blue flame, filling the room with a pleasant, pungent odor which invigorated him like a breath of crisp cold air on a fine winter morning. He went to work like a madman, making the chips of marble fly so fast that the studio looked as if it had been in the way of a passing snowstorm.

"After a while the marble began to take the form of a graceful woman. He was so nervous that he resolved to postpone the work upon the head until he felt calmer, so as yet that part of the figure was a mere block of marble; but the shoulders became smooth and dimpled, the arms rounded, the waist slender, the hands delicately tapering and the feet a dream of exquisite proportion, while the whole figure seemed as full of life and as lissome as though dancing upon a moonbeam.

"Then he began the head, and, oh, how carefully he worked! The head took a noble shape, with its abundant wavy hair; the small ears were

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perfect, the curve of the chin was faultless and the lips were so alluring in their mischievous smile that the sculptor laughed aloud with joy as he surveyed them.

“But still the nose was a shapeless mass, for he had left that feature until the last. He turned to find one of his most delicate tools and turned cold as he beheld the disk, of which there was a very small piece left, burning with a faintly flickering flame. Oh, what a madman he had been! he now said to himself. Why had he not finished the head and left the risk of imperfection to the feet? He bitterly regretted his foolish nervousness in leaving the head for the last in the hope that he would gain more confidence as he worked. Carefully he chipped at the nose; nearer and nearer it was assuming a resemblance to life; now it was all finished save the top, there being a piece about the size of a large pea on the bridge of it which must be taken off, and then it would be completed. Just a few moments more—and here he heard a splutter, and, looking around, he saw that the disk was entirely consumed! It was too late to finish his work; and here was the statue, the perfection of beauty in every particular save the nose, which had an unsightly hump on the bridge.

“The sculptor threw himself on the floor and gave himself up to despair. When he rose he glanced at his work, spoiled for ever by that hideous imperfection, and his heart beat for joy, for

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the figure did not live. It was still a marble statue. He resolved to break it up before it came to life. Let the fortune go; he would be well rid of it if the price he must pay would be for ever to behold that ridiculous nose.

“He took the hammer and hit it a blow on the arm.

“‘O-o-o-o-h!’ shrieked the statue, vigorously rubbing her elbow. ‘How can you be so cruel?’ Instantly her cheek glowed with the tint of life, her eyes turned blue and sparkled, her hair rippled a rich gold, while her drapery became silken and was adorned with lace like the breath of frost. She stepped from her pedestal and buried her face in her hands.

“‘It is unkind of you to treat me so when I have been your wife such a little, little while,’ she sobbed. ‘To strike me, and with a hammer!’

“‘Madame, pray forgive me! I thought you were of marble,’ he stammered.

“‘Marble, indeed! It is you who have a marble heart. But I will forgive you if you will not strike me again.’ She raised her head with a coquettish glance, which would have been irresistible had it not been for that terrible nose.

“Well, she was his wife and there was no getting around it; and she was strong and vigorous and would live to a good old age. There was nothing to do but to claim the fortune—which he did—and he built the marble palace with the goddesses

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and the dancing nymphs just as he had dreamed that it should be. And in time he was very happy, for his wife was so sweet and so unselfish that, though her nose was always the same, he never saw the imperfection, for love had touched his eyelids with magic and ere long he grew to consider her the most beautiful woman in all the world; and had he been carving another wife he would have made her just like this one even to the hump on the nose."

"Every man should think his wife beautiful," observed Olympie, when the story was finished.

No one replied to this remark, though some of those present thought that Jules would be obliged to be endowed with a lurid imagination to see any beauty in Olympie, whose nose was not only longer than seemed to be at all necessary, but also was slightly humped on the bridge.

"Did Jules carve you out of marble, Olympie?" asked Fabien, eying her curiously.

"No," snapped the old woman, "and I should not have thanked him for it if he had. I should have been a great deal better off in a block of marble than out of it." This had been one of Olympie's busy and, consequently, cross days.

Señora Velasco had entered the kitchen before Guillot had finished his story and unseen by the others had slipped into a chair in a shadowy corner. She now came forward and all rose respectfully as they became aware of her presence. "I

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was much interested in the story of the sculptor's bride," said she, "and it teaches a lesson which I hope these young people will remember, and that is that beauty of soul is of far more consequence than loveliness of feature. And now, my children, it is bedtime."

Jules handed his mistress a candle, Guillot and his little master followed Señora Velasco, who walked between her two children down the dark cold hall. The fitful glare of the light caused their shadows to play a fantastic game on the walls. Fabien shuffled along, trying to swing his whole weight on Guillot's arm.

"Guillot shall tell me stories after I am in bed; you have not a valet to tell you stories,—you, yah Pedro!" he said mockingly.

"We have our mother to tuck us in bed and she is better than valets and stories," returned the other boy.

"And you would both be happier if you would cease to taunt," said she.

CHAPTER VIII

PETRONILLA AND MAROC

Petronilla owned a doll of which she was very fond, but the small girl of to-day, whose doll can open and close its eyes and has real hair, would laugh at the grotesque object of Petronilla's affection.

Tomas, who was supposed to have a gift for cutting things out of wood, made this specimen of the doll family, remarkable for various peculiarities of face and form. Its nose was entirely too flat for beauty, and one eye was a good deal larger than the other; but as if the artist had wished to be perfectly fair and not give one optic any advantage, the small eye was higher than its fellow. The lower limbs had been carved, but never separated, being still in one block. This last mentioned infirmity was very annoying to Petronilla, though it did not grieve her so much as another strange freak of her child. The arms had been hung on pegs to enable them to move; but the right arm had from the very first refused to come down after being once raised above the head. This gave the doll the attitude of one who is about to make a

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declaration or utter a command. This position, being constantly maintained, was not only unnatural, but it interfered with the fit of her gowns and even spoiled the effect of her bonnets.

The little girl soon made friends with Maroc and found him to be a far more satisfactory doll than the strange object created by Tomas. She often had wished for a live doll—a desire which found its expression in a frequent dressing-up of the cat. But Puss objected most decidedly to clothing of any kind and never failed to undress herself at the earliest possible moment.

Maroc, on the contrary, wore his clothes without making any objection unless the strings of his cap happened to be too tight; then he put up his paws and tried to loosen them. Petronilla made clothes for him out of old gowns of her own and hugely enjoyed the sport. She often wished that Maroc had no tail, for she thought it spoiled the general effect of his costume; but no one is perfect.

She always gave him something good to eat after she had played with him, which probably was one reason why he was so obliging. Maroc always took anything that was offered to him in the way of a delicacy, and if he felt that he would not relish it at the moment he stored it away in his jaw to be left, so to speak, until called for. There were times when he looked as if he were suffering from a siege of toothache on both sides of his face, but it was nothing more serious than a store of sun-

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dry goodies which he was keeping to enjoy at a more convenient season.

One morning, with Maroc in her arms, Petronilla wandered to her aunt's bedroom. The old lady was busy in another part of the mansion, and her niece examined at her leisure a good many things she was not allowed to touch when her grim relative was present. After a while she resolved to put the monkey baby to bed.

A hundred years before, John, the husband of Blanche, Queen of Navarre, had, when hunting in the mountains, stopped for a time at the castle, and Aunt Catalina chose to occupy the room which had been honored by his stay in it and to sleep in the bed where the head of royalty had rested. The bed, with its dark curtains and heavy canopy, was as gloomy in appearance as if it had been haunted by the uneasy dreams of all those who had sought repose beneath its drapery. But Petronilla did not think of its history as she gaily turned down the covers and placed Maroc beneath them.

Her playfellow objected to bed, or it may have been that he was not inclined to sleep; anyhow, it was only after a series of struggles that she could induce him to lie quiet. Then she said, "That red cap is not suitable for you to sleep in, my dear; you shall have my aunt's nightcap."

Aunt Catalina's nightcap was not spangled as the nightcaps of Queen Elizabeth were at a later date, but was of coarse linen trimmed with home-

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made lace. Of course there was a great difference between the size of the old lady's head and that of the monkey, but by dint of using a great many wooden pins, turning back the front and tying the strings twice about the neck, Petronilla finally made it fit. "Now," said she, "you are Aunt Catalina, and you are very ill and I have come to bring you some lovely *feuillantines*."

"What are you doing in my room?" asked a harsh voice at her elbow; and, turning with a start of surprise, the little girl beheld her aunt.

Maroc, who was very much afraid of Aunt Catalina, sprang from the bed and ran up the post to the top of the canopy. Ousted from that place of refuge by a mop handle wielded by the vigorous arms of the irate old lady, he leaped to the floor, ran down the stairs and out of doors, and climbed a tree, still wearing the nightcap. On the topmost limb he sat and trembled and probably execrated the general injustice of things, which caused him to suffer for a transgression for which he was not only not responsible, but of which he had strongly disapproved.

He was taken from the tree by Petronilla, who said: "Whip me, Aunt Catalina, but do not touch Maroc, who is not to blame."

The old lady clutched her niece's arm and led her to the bedroom. There she was made to take out the pins and replace them where she had found them, to fold the cap and put it away and

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then to remove all the bed covering and replace it without a wrinkle, Aunt Catalina watching her meanwhile with fiery eyes.

"Now," said her aunt, when this was finished, "take your lace-work and sit down. You do not go out of the house this day! You ought to be put down in that old donjon-keep in the ruined wing of the castle where prisoners used to be sent for smaller crimes than yours, I warrant you. To put that disgusting animal in my bed! I do not see how I can ever sleep in it again."

Fabien and Pedro, searching for Petronilla, looked in at the door, where they found the small prisoner working diligently with bent head, while her jailer raised her hand, saying: "Make your plans without reference to her. She plays no more to-day, I can tell you!"

As the two boys went out to the courtyard Fabien said: "I will tell you what would be a fine thing to do! Let us go to that forest beyond the village."

Pedro shook his head. "We are not allowed to go so far away from home without Tomas, and he is busy."

"That does not make any difference; let us take the horses and go anyway."

"We could not get them out of the stable without being seen."

"Will you go if your mother says we may go alone? I will ask her," said Fabien.



“Now,” said she, “you are Aunt Catalina and you are very ill”

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"Of course I would, but there is no use in your asking, she will be sure to say no."

"I shall try, anyway," said the French boy. "People do not often refuse me anything."

He went inside and soon returned, saying: "She says we can not have the horses and that we must not bother Tomas, but that we can take Tonito, who is loose in the barnyard, and go to the forest if we like."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Pedro. "I am going to ask her if we would better—"

"No, no," interrupted Fabien. "She said not to trouble her again as she was just going into the chapel to pray."

Pedro knew that his mother, who was very pious, often went into the castle chapel, or oratory, to pray at this hour, so he gave up the idea of speaking to her, saying: "Then I will ask Jules to put something in a bag for us to eat, for we shall be hungry before we return."

"I am not going to carry food like a peasant," replied Fabien haughtily. "We will stop at the village inn and order a dinner. I have plenty of money in my purse to pay for it."

"But I have no money to pay for mine, and Jules can as well—"

"I tell you I won't have it! I shall pay for both of us. I know how a gentleman should conduct himself at an inn, I should hope. I journeyed from Nérac to Pau with my uncle, the Count de

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Saint Victor, who is one of the finest gentlemen in the French court, and I shall not be at a loss what to do."

By the time the boys were ready to go they found Tonito saddled and tied to a tree. Fabien looked surprised, but Pedro said Tomas must have heard that they were allowed to go and had made the little animal ready for them.

Fabien said, "Let us hurry and get away before Tomas comes back."

"Why?" asked Pedro.

"Oh, just to show him that we can get started without his assistance."

Pedro mounted in the saddle while Fabien sat behind him. The latter carried a stick, with which he occasionally struck Tonito, and they were soon going down the road as rapidly as the little donkey could carry them.

CHAPTER IX

THE CONSEQUENCES OF BOASTING

“This is fine!” cried Fabien as they trotted toward the village. “I like to be a man once in a while. It is such a bore to be watched all the time. I can not move without Guillot at my heels.”

“It is not very much like a man to be riding behind some one on a donkey,” observed Pedro.

“Oh, but, you see, I am a nobleman who is riding out with two donkeys,” returned Fabien with a giggle.

Instantly Tonito’s head was turned toward home.

“What is the matter?” asked Fabien in alarm.

“The matter is that we are going home. I shall not take a trip with you behind me if you intend to make disagreeable remarks all the way. I do not care for that one, but I know you, Fabien. You will keep on and pretty soon you will begin to pinch—”

“No, I shall not. I shall not say another taunting word,—on the honor of a gentleman.”

“Very well then.” And Tonito’s head was again turned toward the village.

“I am growing very hungry,” said Fabien after a while. “Which is the best inn in the village?”

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"There is but one."

"Then we must go to that one, and you must let me do all the talking, for I have traveled and you have not."

"It is only fair that you should do all the talking, since you have the money."

"That is true. I put three gold pieces and a lot of silver in my purse. Guillot was saving the gold to pay for something, but I took it out of the box. It is mine and I think it is much pleasanter to spend your money for amusement than to use it in paying debts."

"My mother says, pay your debts, and if there is anything left keep it for yourself," said Pedro.

"She is a woman," returned Fabien loftily. "When women talk you can let them keep on talking, but you can have plenty of thoughts inside of your head that they do not know anything about. A gentleman never pays his debts."

"If you did not intend to pay for anything, why did you bring your purse?" asked Pedro indignantly; adding: "If you are going to cheat the innkeeper out of the price of the dinner I shall not eat a bite of it."

"Of course I shall pay for the dinner. The kind of debts I mentioned are those you owe the tailor and people like that. Guillot says his other master did not pay his tailor for five years and made Guillot put him out when he came to ask for his money."

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“Then he was just a low-born thief and nothing else,” cried Pedro.

They rode up to the inn and dismounted, Fabien directing the grinning stable-boy to take charge of their steed, at the same time throwing the astonished youth a piece of silver.

Entering the inn the little marquis said to the landlord: “See that my horse has plenty of oats, my good man, and that he has a good rubbing-down.”

The innkeeper laughed. “You may call that beast a horse if it pleases you, my little man,” said he, “but I call it a donkey.”

Fabien frowned. “Do you know to whom you are talking?” he asked.

“No, I do not, but I should know this little fellow. Are you not the son of Señora Velasco, my boy?”

“Yes, I am Pedro Hernandez de Velasco.”

“And I am Fabien Alexandre Pierre Auguste, Marquis de Tallanges,” said the other boy.

The landlord laughed again, but his smile turned to a look of respect when Fabien took out the contents of his purse and, after glancing at them carelessly, replaced them, saying: “And now, my good fellow, prepare dinner for us. A venison pasty, a couple of fowls and four bottles of your best wine,—the very best, look you, and anything you may have in the way of sweets, and make haste about it, too!”

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"Yes, Monsieur le Marquis, certainly, sir," replied the innkeeper, who had been greatly impressed by the sight of so much money.

A dark man was quietly taking a meal at the other end of the room. This individual was of somewhat forbidding appearance, owing to a scar that diagonally crossed one side of his face from temple to chin. His clothes were not very clean, but he wore a red sash knotted about his waist and a pair of small gold rings in his ears. Engaged with his bread, cheese and wine, he seemed to be paying no attention to the latest arrivals, though Fabien jingled his coins and amused himself by tossing his gold pieces up in the air and catching them as they fell.

"Why did you order so much for dinner, Fabien?" asked Pedro. "We never can eat it. And two fowls! Why, we could not eat all of one. And four bottles of wine! I never drink it and you are not allowed to touch it. Why did you not order milk instead?"

"Milk!" was the contemptuous reply. "Do you suppose I am going to order at an inn such a baby's drink as milk? Who ever heard of such a thing? As to the rest of the dinner we can leave what we do not care for. I did not want to seem stingy when I ordered it."

"Well, do not be alarmed; you did not seem stingy. But if you try to drink much wine you will be tipsy and I shall have to fetch Guillot."

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"I do not intend to taste the wine," replied Fabien. "I hate the stuff, because there used to be a dreadful medicine that I was made to swallow in wine. I never shall like it—which is a great pity, for gentlemen always drink."

"Then what will you do with all those bottles? It was very foolish to order them, for of course you will have to pay for them."

"I do not know what I shall do with it. Do not bother about it. If we should order a dinner without wine the innkeeper would think nothing at all of us."

"As it is," said Pedro, "he will think us boobies for ordering what we can not use."

When the waiter began to arrange the table Fabien said: "If that is for us you may place it by the window, as we do not intend to eat in the corner like two pussy-cats."

"Certainly, Monsieur le Marquis." And the table was removed to the desired spot.

Such a dinner as Fabien ordered can not be produced in the twinkling of an eye, but that youth grew very cross because it was so long delayed. He scolded the waiter, he sent three times for the landlord, who explained that a meat pasty requires time to prepare, and that a dinner worthy of a guest so distinguished can not be served in a moment. The man at the other end of the room had long since departed when the dinner was served, and with it one bottle of wine.

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"I ordered four bottles," said Fabien; "it is a great pity that I can not have what I want."

"Certainly, Monsieur le Marquis, but I am accustomed to bring wine in as it is needed."

"Oh," said Fabien, somewhat chagrined. "I meant that you should have it ready for me when I want it."

The waiter brought two tall metal cups and uncorked the wine.

"Have you no silver goblets?" asked Fabien complainingly.

The waiter was sorry, but all their silver was just now being polished.

"Nor crystal?" insisted the boy.

The waiter was deeply grieved, but a careless kitchen girl had smashed all the crystal that very morning. He filled the cups and left the room. Fabien seized them and emptied them out of the window, pouring what remained in the bottle out in the same way.

The waiter returned almost immediately and the young marquis said: "Another bottle, please." The man stared, took up the empty bottle and disappeared.

When the third bottle had been emptied, the waiter went for the fourth in the manner of a man who is dazed. Then he stood and gazed at the two boys, who were just finishing a hearty dinner. He lingered about the room so long that Fabien was afraid he would not have an oppor-

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tunity to dispose of the last bottle, but finally some one called the man from the outside, and when he returned the bottle was as empty as its predecessors.

The boys both found this trick very interesting and, though Fabien could not quite banish his broad grin before the return of the waiter, Pedro managed to look serious and even mournful,—it being a complaint made by Aunt Catalina that one never could tell by that boy's countenance whether he had been plotting mischief or saying his prayers.

The innkeeper was not modest in his reckoning and the bill called for one of the gold pieces. Fabien paid as one who is accustomed to such prices, also giving a piece of silver to the waiter.

As the two boys rode away on the donkey, mine host, his wife and all the servants went to the door to look after them.

“May I swing from the tallest tree if I ever saw anything like it in all the days I have walked the earth!” exclaimed the innkeeper. “They are riding just as straight as if they had been drinking nothing but water. One gallon of my best, strongest wine have they had, and it has not even made them dizzy! And I will take my oath that they are not above a dozen years old at the outside.”

“It did make them gay,” observed his wife; “I could hear them laughing.”

“It was not the wine that made them gay, I give

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you my word. I have seen its effects too often to be deceived. I tell you they were not tipsy in the least; the eyes of young Velasco in particular were as clear as two calm, pellucid lakes. If they can drink like this now, what will they do when they grow up?"

That anybody would buy old wine on purpose to throw it out of the window would have seemed as marvelous to the landlord as the fact that two boys could drink so much without feeling its effects.

In the meantime Tonito trotted contentedly along the road toward the forest with his burden. He, too, having been well fed, was disposed to be obliging.

"We can take the path through the forest that leads to the monastery and we can surprise Brother François with a visit," said Pedro.

"Not for the world!" objected Fabien. "When we are out for a good time why do you want to visit a lot of mournful old monks? Brother François will be sure to think of some lesson he wants us to learn before to-morrow and he will want us to stay for vespers."

"My mother would be greatly shocked to hear you talk in that way about the friars," said Pedro.

"I dare say, but she does not hear me. Guillot says the Huguenots do not believe in monks and he also says he himself thinks they are like a lot of old women, but he does not say a word about it to anybody but me, for he does not think it safe. You

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see the difference between a valet and a gentleman. If I were grown up, and felt about it as he does, I should draw my sword—and I should have the finest one that could be bought—and I should say, 'Monks and friars are a lot of old women, and I dare anybody to deny it!'

"It would be an easy way to start a fight," remarked Pedro.

"That would be just what I should like; when I grow up I expect to be fighting most of the time."

Thus conversing, the boys reached the forest path. As Fabien was averse to visiting the monastery they agreed that when they should come to a spot that pleased their fancy Tonito should be tied while the boys disported themselves among the trees. The sun was rapidly declining toward the west and it was somewhat somber in the forest. Pedro said, as they dismounted, that they could stay but a short time if they were to get home before overtaken by darkness.

They had just secured the donkey to a chestnut-tree when they heard hoof-beats on the hard path in the direction from which they had come. Turning, they beheld the dark man whom they had seen dining at the inn.

"Good day, my little gentlemen," said he, "I am pleased to have found you. I was so anxious to see you again that I waited for you for some time, but I had taken the wrong road and only discovered my mistake a little while ago."

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"Why were you anxious to see us?" asked Pedro. He was not favorably impressed with this stranger, who tried to look pleasant, but whose smile seemed to be a mere stretching of the lips to show a set of large, irregular teeth,—a kind of smile that was all on the outside and had no good fellowship back of it.

"Why did I want to see you? Well, it is not every day that a common body like myself has the opportunity to ride in the company of two noble youths such as Don Pedro Hernandez de Velasco and Monsieur Alexandre What-do-you-call-him, Marquis de Mille Tonnerres."

"That is not my name," snarled Fabien, "and if you did want to ride with us, what reason had you for thinking that we wanted to ride with you?"

"For the reason that boys are always so fond of me. I have led a wild life of adventure and they like to hear me tell about it. I can also make a trap for a squirrel and they like to learn how to do it and—oh, boys always find me very enchanting."

He grinned in a manner so comical as he made this reply that both boys burst out laughing. "Come," said the man, dismounting, "I will tie my horse near yours and I will get some sticks and show you how to make the trap in the twinkling of an eye. And when you are ready to go to your home I shall esteem it a great honor to ride beside you and relate the story of how I once came very

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near being slain by a wild boar, and various other things that have happened to me."

What boy could resist a program so tempting? "I want a pet squirrel," said Fabien. "Will your trap catch him alive without crippling him?"

"Indeed it will. It will not hurt him in the least. I should not be at all surprised if we should entrap one before we leave the forest. If not, you can take the trap home with you and try it another day. But I do not see any sticks of the right size about here; let us go farther into the forest."

He led the way, talking rapidly all the time, picking up a stick here and there, but always throwing it away after breaking it across his knee, and in the meantime going farther and farther away from the path. After a while he stopped and asked abruptly: "What kind of ornament is that you have in your hat, Monsieur le Marquis? It is not genuine, of course; even so noble a house as your own would not permit a small boy to wear a jewel so valuable."

"It is real," replied Fabien, nettled by the fact that any one should imagine he did not have the best of everything that was going. "Have you ever heard of the great Italian artist, Benvenuto Cellini?"

"Indeed I have."

"Well, while he was at the court of France he made gold medals for gentlemen to wear in their hats and engraved them."

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"Engraved the hats or the gentlemen?" asked the man politely.

"He engraved the medals, of course. He put on them beautiful figures and flowers such as no one else could do, and sometimes with the chasing he set a jewel, and one of those my grandmother bought for me. She says that Benvenuto was so great an artist that my children and great-great-grandchildren will consider this medal a fortune."

"What a pity to wait so long before it is appreciated!" said the dark man with an expansive smile. "And then you may never marry; you may never be a grandfather, or even a great-grandfather. I, who can appreciate and value its beauty, should have it now."

And before Fabien had time to object the man had snatched off the hat, torn the jewel from it and had placed the work of Benvenuto Cellini in his wallet.

"Give that back!" shouted Fabien, with great fury. "What do you mean by teasing me like this?"

"Do not lose your temper, my dear little Marquis," said the robber, "you will only do yourself harm. I think I shall take your purse, for you were anxious at the inn to let us all see that it was a fat one."

He imprisoned both of Fabien's hands in one of his own and endeavored to loosen the purse from

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the boy's belt, the latter meanwhile struggling and striving to bite his captor's hand.

Pedro, who up to this time had believed their new acquaintance to be merely indulging in rough play, sprang forward. Having no weapon of his own he drew out Fabien's dagger and succeeded in giving the ruffian a somewhat severe cut on the arm, though the weapon was little more than a trifling toy.

"Oh, ho! That is your trick, is it, my little pop-injay?" asked the man, and having secured Fabien's purse he turned his attention to Pedro, wresting the weapon from him and throwing it far away; then holding the boy's arms he drew a strong cord from his wallet and tied him so that Pedro's arms were bound to his side. Having performed the same act for Fabien he tied the boys to trees. He smiled as they shrieked for help.

"I could put gags in your mouths, but I am a tender-hearted man; moreover, I am quite sure that no one will hear you as we have come a good distance from the path. To-morrow morning or the day after I have no doubt that some woodman will run across you and release you, or your people at home will search for you. Some men in my place would kill you, but I never kill babies. I was wondering how I could get some funds and that little braggart told me at the inn where they could be obtained. And I think I will take that fine little donkey. I sometimes need a beast to

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carry my goods. Good-by, boys, I hope you will not be lonely."

Again the boys cried aloud for help, but the only answer they received was the mocking laugh of the robber as he disappeared among the trees.

They called aloud until they were hoarse; then Fabien began to weep with anger and terror. Pedro's dark eyes were filled with tears, not for himself, but for poor little Tonito whom he never should see again. Then he tried to comfort Fabien. "Do not fret yourself, Fabien. My mother will think that we are lost in the forest and she will send Tomas to find us, never fear."

"She will not know where to send him," sobbed Fabien. "Your mother does not know where we are, and she will be more likely to send him to search for us on the mountain."

"Why," replied Pedro, "you told me that you asked if we could come to the forest and that she gave her consent."

"I did not ask her. I knew that you would not come without her permission and I was sure she would not give it, so I pretended that I had asked her and that she had said yes."

"You did?" cried Pedro indignantly. "I might have known that you would do a mean thing like that! What will my mother think of me when I promised her on my honor that I never would go out of the great gate without her consent? But you told Tomas, he knows where we are."



‘Oh, ho, that is your trick, is it, my little popinjay?’

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"Nobody knows anything about it," replied Fabien sulkily.

"Then why was Tonito saddled?"

"I do not know; for some one else, I suppose."

"I will never believe another word that you say," said Pedro. "You call yourself a gentleman, but you tell more fibs than a smuggler."

The French boy began to sob again, but Pedro was too hard-hearted to pity him. "He has done all the mischief, why should I, too, suffer for it?" he thought. A similar problem has puzzled older heads.

It was now growing quite dusky in the forest. The twitter of the birds could no longer be heard as they sought their nests, and no sound disturbed the quiet save the whispering of the wind through the trees.

"We shall have to stay here all night," said Pedro, "and we might as well make up our minds to it." He wondered if he could sleep in that position and he drooped his head toward his left shoulder. Then he found by lifting his shoulder he could, with his teeth, reach a strand of the cord which fastened him to the tree. This cord he began to chew, for, though it was strong, it was not very thick, and it was not long before he found himself free from the tree, though his arms were still tied. Then he went to Fabien who, by biting the cord that bound Pedro's arms, soon severed it; after which Pedro untied his companion. So

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they were both free and consequently much relieved, though their surroundings were anything but cheerful; for the owl was beginning his mournful shriek, which, though they knew perfectly well what it was, caused the boys to shudder and to take each other by the hand.

"Come," said Pedro, "let us see if we can find the path. We shall be no worse off elsewhere than here."

They stumbled along over the uneven ground, for they could not see where they were going, and they only escaped contact with the trees because the trees were blacker than the black mist about them.

After a while the pale moon rose and filtered her light through the limbs and leaves of the forest. The boys took heart and walked rapidly, though they arrived nowhere and seemed to be going in a circle.

"I can not go any farther," panted Fabien after a while.

Pedro felt that this was true. Even he was very tired and he was much stronger than the little marquis. They lay down in the leaves and put their arms about each other for company's sake, and Pedro was almost asleep when he heard the clump! clump! of heavy feet. Instantly he sat up, Fabien following suit.

A black, four-footed animal stood quite near them.

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"It is a wild boar!" whispered the little marquis with stiffening lips.

"It is a bear," breathed Pedro.

Neither was disposed to argue the matter which, after all, was of little importance, since if one is to be eaten at all one might as well satisfy the hunger of a bear as of a wild boar.

"Let us run," whispered Pedro.

"I can not, I am too sc-c-c-ared," whispered the other with chattering teeth.

Pedro dragged his companion to his feet, and as he rose the former uttered a cry of delight. He could now see the outlines of the animal's head and two tall, pointed ears, which revealed the fact that the creature was neither a bear nor a boar, but Tonito!

Yes, it was the little donkey, which had not been found by the robber, but which, before the latter's return, had loosened his carelessly-fastened bridle-strap and had wandered into the woods on his own account, his mind bent upon thistles.

Pedro was so glad that the animal was not a wild beast and also that Tonito was not lost to him for ever that he threw his arms about the little donkey's neck in a transport of joy. "Now we are all right," he said, "for Tonito knows the way to the monastery and he will take us there."

Fabien made no objection to the monastery now, or even to the lecture he might expect from Brother François, for anything was preferable to

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this dark and gloomy forest. So the two boys mounted as before, and in the course of an hour arrived at a low, square building surrounded by a wall.

Pedro rang a bell at the gate, which was soon opened by a tall, black-robed figure which the boy addressed as Brother Joseph. "Won't you take us in for the night? We have been robbed and tied to a tree."

"Most assuredly, my little man," replied the friar, who never asked questions and never exhibited surprise at anything. "We never refuse shelter and food to the unfortunate. The evening repast has not yet begun. You know the way, Pedro; go to the refectory while I take care of the donkey."

Pedro led the way to a large room, where at a long table the friars were about to partake of a smoking supper. He looked for Brother François, and discovered him at a raised desk at the side of the room, where he was about to read aloud to his brother monks, so that mind and body might be refreshed at the same time.

Pedro did not try to speak with him, for he well knew that neither by word nor look would Brother François at this time manifest his knowledge of their presence. Two of the friars moved to one side and made places for their small guests, who were served first of all. The supper, unlike the dinner which Fabien had ordered at the inn, was

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plain, but it was hot and well cooked and was most welcome to the boys, who, now that there was no cause for uneasiness, were very hungry.

Brother François was reading of Saint Francis:

"A lark brought her brood of nestlings to his cell, to be fed from his hands. He saw that the strongest of these nestlings tyrannized over the others, pecking at them and taking more than his due share of food; whereupon the good saint rebuked the creature, saying: 'Thou unjust and insatiable! thou shalt die miserably and the greediest animals shall refuse to eat thy flesh.' And so it happened, for the creature drowned itself through impetuosity in drinking and when it was thrown to the cats they would not touch it."

Brother François was turning the leaves of his book to find other selections when Fabien whispered to Pedro: "Those cats were different from any I was ever acquainted with."

"Hush," said Pedro, "they will hear you."

When the repast was finished Brother François came down from his desk, and with long, swinging steps at once approached the two boys.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked. "Why are you here at this hour?"

Pedro told him they had left home without the consent of his mother, omitting to say who was to blame in the matter, and related their adventures in detail.

Brother François, who by this time had learned

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to read Fabien's character quite well, suspected that the small marquis had planned the escapade, and by dint of much questioning he managed to draw out a full confession. He then read the lad a severe lecture upon the sin of lying.

"You will see by what happened to-day that you can not sin without harming others. A misde-meanor is like a stone dropped into a quiet pool, creating waves that reach clear out to the shore. Your falsehood enabled you to go to a spot where your bragging and your vulgar display of wealth excited the cupidity of a man who committed the grave sin of theft. Your absence no doubt has alarmed Señora Velasco to the verge of illness, and it obliges me to go to the castle to-night to carry to her the news of your safety, though I have important writing to do which ought to be finished immediately."

At this moment the bell rang and the boys went with Brother Joseph to the gate.

"The Señora Velasco has sent for Brother François," said a familiar voice. "Her son and the young marquis have disappeared, and she is almost distracted, for she fears they have wandered up the mountain and have been destroyed by wild beasts."

"No, we are here, Jules," said Pedro's clear voice from the darkness.

"The saints be praised!" said the old man.

Tomas, who accompanied Jules, said the boys

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had not been missed for a long time after their departure. Tomas had saddled Tonito for Jules, who had wished to ride the donkey on an errand. Jules, not finding the animal hitched as requested, supposed that Tomas had refused to oblige him, and, growing sulky, scorned to go to the stable to see why his request had not been granted; while Tomas, supposing that the old man had gone on his errand, thought no more of the matter. When the truth was learned Señora Velasco had sent to Lenoir's hut to find them, and in an agony of dread had directed Guillot, Jules and Tomas to search for them.

"But we must not remain here chattering," cried Jules; "we must return at once to our mistress to let her know that they are safe." And without another word the two men turned and galloped away into the night.

The boys were shown to two tiny rooms, or cells, where the beds though narrow were clean, and so tired were they that they were asleep almost as soon as their heads had touched the pillow.

By the next morning Brother François was as benign as usual, and to atone for his severity of the previous evening he showed the boys some parchment he was illuminating with beautiful letters of red and gold. He also showed them some of the wealth of his Order, consisting of gold chalices set with precious stones, a silver figure of Saint Francis and various reliquaries, but the most val-

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ued of all was a long feather, said to have been dropped from the wing of the Angel Gabriel, and which at the time was sincerely believed to be genuine.

Over the monastery wall climbed grape-vines now laden with luscious fruit, each bunch being covered by a bag of tissue. "Why do you put those bags over the grapes?" asked Fabien of Brother Joseph.

"It is to keep those rascals of birds from stealing them," was the reply.

"Then why do you not preach to the birds and tell them to behave?"

"Ah," said the old friar, wagging his head, "if the blessed Saint Francis were here we should not need the bags, for he could influence them; but we have not his power."

Señora Velasco kissed the boys and wept over them, and, while she, too, endeavored to make Fabien see the error of his ways, she gave him no further punishment, considering the mishap a lesson that would answer as a warning for the future.

CHAPTER X

THE ARRIVAL OF THE COUNT

On the eleventh birthday of the twins Jules took pride in preparing a fine dinner, while Señora Velasco, yielding to the persuasion of her children, donned the yellow satin gown she had worn when a young girl.

They had danced and sung together; then a feeling of sadness had stolen over the three as they stood in the evening before the fire in the salon. The mother had an arm about each of the children. She bent her dark head over first one and then the other, sometimes lifting a hand to smooth a golden lock or to pat the rounded cheek of the boy or the girl, always pressing them close to her side.

"It may be that years will elapse before you will pass another birthday with your mother," she said sadly. "And before many months you will be leaving me. In four weeks will come the festival of Christmas; then will follow Easter—all too quickly when one would stay the flight of time—then soon my Pedro and my Nilla must go away."

Her soft eyes filled with tears and it is probable that the three would soon have been weeping to-

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gether had they not heard the voice of Jules, who ushered in a stranger, announcing: "Monsieur le Comte de Saint-Victor, who comes to visit Monsieur Fabien."

Señora Velasco released the children and came forward with outstretched hand and a smile of welcome for the new-comer.

The Count de Saint-Victor was a tall man, dressed in a riding-suit of dark velvet and in his hand he held a plumed hat. His hair was cut short, after the Spanish style, for Charles the Fifth, having been troubled with headache, had ordered his hair trimmed, which set the fashion for other gentlemen whether they had headache or not; and the style was being adopted at the court of France, where this gentleman belonged. The count's hair was quite gray, but his eyebrows and his long mustache—for he did not wear a beard, although it was the prevailing fashion—were black. He had white teeth, an engaging smile and a pleasant voice and the children liked him at once. He bowed low and lifted the hand of Señora Velasco to his lips, while she expressed her pleasure in welcoming to the castle this guest, who was the brother of Fabien's mother, an uncle of whom she often had heard the boy speak in terms of great admiration and affection.

"From accounts sent us by Fabien's tutor, Brother François, the boy seems to be getting on famously, so far as his health is concerned; and I



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Jules ushered in a stranger, announcing: "Monsieur le Comte de
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am sure his well-being is entirely owing to the kindness of Madame,"—and the count bowed again.

Fabien swaggered into the room at this moment, and, after dutifully allowing himself to be kissed on both cheeks by his uncle, asked: "Uncle Jacques, did you bring me anything?"

"That always is your first question," replied his uncle, laughing. "Give me a chance first to look at you, my nephew. Why, it is phenomenal the way the boy has improved! When last I saw him he was no broader than a rush, a creature of wax; and now look at those fat cheeks, those rounded calves, that ruddy color! Madame, it is like the breath of life to bask in the sunshine of your smile."

"It is being out of doors all day long and not being kissed to death by a lot of women that has made me fat," said Fabien, "and not anybody's smile that has done it."

"My nephew," said the count, turning to Señora Velasco, "has been very much spoiled. The old lady who had charge of him, although she kept him in a bandbox, allowed him to say what he liked and to do what he pleased, and Madame la Marquise, his grandmother, was equally indulgent. My boy, when you are older you will, I hope, know too much to flout women."

"I am not flouting women," said his nephew. "I am fonder of Señora Velasco than of anybody;

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but for an old man you do say a great many foolish things, Uncle Jacques."

"My little nephew," said his uncle good-humoredly, "I grieve to find that you have not gained in politeness as you have in health. You see, Madame, my white hairs have made an aged man of me at thirty-two. You do not like so elderly a man, eh, my little one? —and placing his fingers under Petronilla's chin he looked down at her with a smile.

"We shall like you very much, I am sure," she returned, wishing to place him at his ease. "You see, sir, we have always been used to old people. Nobody knows how old our Aunt Catalina is, Jules, Olympie and Tomas are old, and our mother is old also; she is almost twenty-eight, and in a little more than two years she will be thirty."

Señora Velasco colored and laughed at this remark, and the count said:

"You little elf, you should have been made to believe that madame is your sister, and who would have been the wiser?"

During this conversation Fabien had been standing first on one foot, then on the other, in a state of great impatience; then he broke in with:

"Uncle, if you did not fetch me anything I should like to know it, but if you did I want it at once, if you please."

"Go and ask my servant, who has charge of it," said his uncle.

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The boy ran from the room and soon returned with a book and a very disdainful expression. The volume was a very pretty one; it was bound in silk and gold, and as such books were rare at the time it must have cost a good deal of money. But Fabien felt he had been injured.

“I did not want a book! This is *The Song of Roland*,—what do I care for that? I do not sing, and if I did I should not sing such a long song. Why did you not bring me a hand-gun or a sword?”

“That book,” said his uncle, “is a tale of the time of the great Charlemagne, and it is one of the favorite works of my royal master, the King of France.”

“I do not care if it is,” whined Fabien. “The King of France already has all the guns and swords he wants and he can read sometimes for a change.”

“But it is time you were beginning to care for books.”

“I never shall care for them; I am going to be a fighter.”

“And you look as if you would like to begin the practice of your calling at once,” laughed his uncle. “Well, there are some packets sent by your devoted grandmother to you and your little companions. Ask Pierre if he has not found them.”

Fabien disappeared, and when he returned his face wore a satisfied expression, while he was

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chewing something which seemed to afford him considerable enjoyment. Besides an open package in his hand he held two under his arm, of which he gave one to Petronilla and the other to Pedro.

"Grandmother sent us bonbons; she knows what I like," he said. "When I grow up I intend to eat bonbons all day long!"

"To fight and to eat sweets,—truly a life of bliss!" said his uncle.

Although he had intended to stay at the castle but two days the Count de Saint-Victor remained for a week. The third day it rained, and he said he did not like to travel in the rain. It cleared in the night, then rained for two more days, and he was afraid the streams would be much too high to ford.

"I think my Uncle Jacques is a coward," said Fabien.

"Why?" asked Pedro.

"Because he seems to be so afraid of a little bit of rain. Why does he not mount his horse and go, if he wants to go, and not say, as he does every morning, that he will be obliged to give it up until to-morrow?"

"You can not guess what I heard Guillot say to Tomas," said Petronilla, looking wise.

"What was it?" asked both boys together.

"If you will promise never to tell anybody I will tell you."

Both boys promised breathlessly.

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"Guillot says that the Count de Saint-Victor is in love, so I suppose that is why he stays."

"I can not see what that has to do with it," said Fabien. "If he is so foolish as to fall in love at his age, why does he not go away and be married instead of staying here and looking out of the window every morning and shaking his head at the weather? My nurse used to tell me tales of fairy princes that were in love, and none of them ever acted like that."

"But I did not tell you all. When Guillot said that, Tomas nodded and winked and said the lady was not a thousand miles from this castle; and Guillot winked, too, and said it would be a fine thing for her, and Tomas said nothing was too good for her."

"But who could it be?" asked Fabien in astonishment. "There are no young ladies in this house."

"Not young, really," said Petronilla, "but I suppose you would call her young because she never has been married. It can be no one, of course, but our Aunt Catalina."

"What?" screamed Fabien. "Why, she is too old to be married."

"I have heard Jules say that no one ever is too old to be married, and I am sure that Aunt Catalina's hair is not so white as your uncle's—when you come to hair."

"Then if he marries her she will be my aunt!"

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cried the boy angrily; "and I won't have her for an aunt, I won't, I won't! Why should she want to be everybody's aunt? She shall not be mine, I can tell you!"

"She has been our aunt ever since we were born," said Petronilla with dignity, "and she has been our mother's aunt for a great many years. But none of us go on about it like that."

"That is because you can not help yourselves. You had to take her whether you liked it or not, but I am going to begin in time. I am going to tell Uncle Jacques that she will lock him in his room and put the key in her pocket every time he goes away without her permission. I—"

"If you say one word about it I shall never tell you another thing as long as I live! And, besides that, you promised on your honor not to tell."

"And you would only make it worse, anyhow," said Pedro. "When the tailor's daughter ran away last winter and married a smuggler, I heard Jules say he did not believe she would have done it if her family had not opposed the match. So it will be better to say nothing to your uncle about it."

But Aunt Catalina became an object of sentimental interest to her small niece. She watched her and the count as they sat by the fire during the rainy afternoons and in the evenings,—the count addressing most of his conversation to Señora Velasco as she bent over her embroidery frame, and Aunt Catalina sitting up very stiff and straight

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with hands primly folded, or, strange to say, sometimes falling asleep and nodding. The little girl was very well pleased at the thought of having the count for an uncle, for he was so gay and so kind.

There came a morning when Fabien said: "Uncle Jacques, the sun is shining and Tomas says the streams are not much higher than they are at any time." The boy had an object in wishing his uncle to take his departure. If he remained much longer there would not be time for him to buy a Christmas present and send to his small nephew,—Fabien had a keen eye to his own interests.

So, having no further excuse for remaining, the count declared that he must go. The children begged him to return at Christmas, an invitation which Aunt Catalina seconded; but Señora Velasco said never a word, which her daughter thought impolite, not to say unkind.

But their guest explained that he was about to be sent on an important mission to Spain and could not return for Christmas; but that when they were ready to go to Pau, he might come to take them, the marquise having declared that she would never travel over so rough a road again.

So he said good-by, and it was with regret that the twins watched him ride down the mountain-road.

CHAPTER XI

A SIXTEENTH-CENTURY CHRISTMAS

Ever since they could remember the twins had looked upon Jules as the planner of all Christmas merrymaking. When they were quite small their mother had been too sad to take an interest in any kind of festivities and their aunt was too sour of disposition to notice the day in any way, save in the observance of the religious services. But old Jules had always made the season a happy one for the children and had practised various customs learned in his native province in his youth.

The very word Christmas has an engaging sound, and to those children in the mountains as to the small folk of to-day it was the most delightful time of the year.

In the first place there was the selecting of the Christmas log. Jules must select it himself, of course, but the children were always allowed to go with him to the wood. Having found a tree that pleased him, the old man marked it and at midnight he and Tomas went to cut it down; for no one ever heard of a Christmas log that was cut down in plain matter-of-fact daylight, the mystery of midnight being absolutely necessary to make it

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a success. The spell of the log by no means ended when it was a mass of white ashes, for some of those ashes were always put away under the bed of the master of the house, (and the master here was Pedro) ; and when the sound of thunder reverberated through the mountains and lightning illuminated the peaks, some of the ashes were cast into the fire to prevent the house from being struck by a bolt; and Jules often asserted with great pride that though lightning had more than once struck trees in the vicinity, the castle, under the spell of the ashes from the Christmas log, had remained unharmed.

Jules was very busy at this time. There were dozens of those queer cakes—called *cornaboeux*, because they were crescent-shaped and curved like the horns of an ox—to be baked and given to the poor. Then there was another cake to be baked for the family, a part of which was to be put away, for it never would spoil or get moldy; this was to be eaten in case of sickness, being warranted to cure every malady known and unknown. No one in the castle had ever had occasion to test its efficacy as a cure, but it was the old man's private belief that it was the presence of the cake that kept sickness at bay.

All the inmates of the castle watched the lighting of the Christmas log. First Brother François sprinkled it with holy water, then Pedro, as the male head of the family, kindled it with a torch

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just as the first bell rang for midnight mass, which was always held in the castle chapel.

Then what a supper there was after the midnight mass! Señora Velasco had invited a few friends, and, as this year there was no scarcity of money, Jules, bubbling over with delight at being able to show what he could do in baking and roasting, surpassed himself. He was as proud as a king when at the end of the repast he was sent for, and with great applause a toast was quaffed in his honor.

But the most fascinating feature of the occasion was the Christmas branch suspended from the ceiling and decorated with egg-shells and nuts. To the children of to-day, whose trees are trimmed with candles and countless glittering ornaments, old Jules' Christmas branch would seem but a sorry affair; but it was a splendid thing to the Velasco twins, and even Fabien did not withhold his admiration of it.

Two days before, a messenger had arrived with a package for Señora Velasco, who merely laughed and refused to answer when questioned by the children regarding the contents of the bundle. But now the mystery was solved, for everybody about the place received presents from the Marquise de Tallanges and the Count de Saint-Victor. The children had each a ring set with jewels, the boys received guns, and Petronilla a pair of violet-velvet shoes slashed with satin,

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which, though they made her feet look larger than they really were, filled her soul with joy.

From the marquise Señora Velasco received a silk robe lined with costly fur, and from the count a pair of gloves of perfumed leather embroidered with pearls. Gloves of this description were the height of fashion, for they were admired by the Valois, the reigning family of France. The marquise presented Aunt Catalina with a fine velvet hood and the count sent her a gift which, though of little practical use, greatly pleased the old lady. It was a fan of painted chicken-skin, and was the first folded fan Aunt Catalina ever had seen. The Portuguese had brought folded fans from Japan, and had extended their use until Catherine de' Medici had introduced them into the court of France. It was related that Catherine de' Medici considered the management of the fan a matter so important that when she became Queen of France she sent one of her ladies-in-waiting to the court of Spain to watch Doña Inez de Mendoza when she fanned herself, for this lady could flirt her fan in ninety-nine different ways. Whether the French woman learned them all as she was expected to do or whether she recrossed the Pyrenees in a huff because she could not learn so deftly to manage the toy will never be known.

But Aunt Catalina did not care to manage or even to use her fan; it was the first thing since her youth which had been given her merely for beau-

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ty's sake and not for use, and she carefully laid it away to be treasured for the rest of her life.

Besides the presents already mentioned, Brother François received two gold pieces; and although he was not allowed to possess any money of his own he was glad to add to the wealth of his Order, and was as pleased as if he had kept the gold for himself. All the servants received silver pieces; there were sweets for everybody; and, taken altogether, it was the most joyous Christmas the old castle had witnessed for many years.

CHAPTER XII

THE CHILDREN START ON A JOURNEY

As the gentle mother had said, the days passed all too quickly and now the time was drawing near when her children must leave her. Fabien had continued to gain health and strength and consequently was much better looking than when we first saw him, though he was still far from being a handsome boy. The village tailor was making clothing for the twins and Aunt Catalina was putting stitches of repair in the clothes they already possessed, although she was repeatedly told by Señora Velasco that at court the children could not wear patched or darned clothing, and that garments needing such attention must be left behind.

All the village knew that the Velasco twins were going to court in a short time and that they would be in the care of the Marquise de Tallanges; and while many said that it would be the finest thing in the world for them, there were a few who shook their heads wisely and remarked that the mother would regret the day when she allowed her children to go so far from home.

Although she tried to keep a brave face before

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Pedro and Petronilla, Señora Velasco wept much when alone and sometimes they awoke in the night to find her sitting beside their beds.

"I saw our mother sitting in the moonlight beside me," said Pedro one morning to his sister, "and she looked so pale and sad that I believed her to be the Mother of Sorrows come down from the picture in the chapel."

"And she sits beside me until I go to sleep," said his sister, "and last night I said, 'Please, mother dear, do not look so heartbroken, for just as soon as Pedro gets a great deal of money at court we will come back and build another castle a great deal handsomer than this, and you shall wear beautiful velvet dresses every day of the world.' "

"And that is just what we will do," said Pedro, "and she will be beautiful in the jewels and other lovely things I intend to buy for her."

At length the Count de Saint-Victor arrived, bringing two litters and accompanied by a number of horsemen; for not only was it necessary for the children to be provided with means of conveyance, but it was of great importance that they should be guarded while traveling over a road infested with robbers.

Everybody was glad to see the count again, and he was so delighted to be at the castle once more that he seemed to be in no hurry to begin the trip. His anxiety to delay their departure was some-

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what exasperating to the children, for where lives, or ever has lived, the child who did not want to begin a journey at the appointed time?

"It is too bad that my uncle had to fall in love with your aunt," said Fabien, "for there is no telling how long he will want to stay here. Would it not be a dreadful thing if they should marry and she should go with us?"

"It would," agreed Petronilla, "but they are not going to be married soon, of that I am sure, for a bride always wears a veil and a crown and a lovely white gown, and I know Aunt Catalina has nothing of the kind or I should have seen it."

When at last the day came for their departure it would be difficult to find a prettier pair of children than were the Velasco twins in their new clothes. Petronilla wore a gown of violet taffeta with a cunning little close bonnet to match, not so close, however, as to conceal entirely her hair, for a little curl would peep out here and there in spite of the fact that her aunt had tucked it away more than once. Pedro was clad in a doublet of violet velvet with silk hose that matched it in color, and his cap of violet velvet was adorned with a long curling white plume. At his side he wore his father's dagger, and there was not a prouder boy in the land than Pedro Hernandez de Velasco. And what do you think? He at once began to be rebellious, for he declared that he would not ride in a litter like a woman or an old

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man. Did the noble Chevalier Bayard go forth to seek his fortune in a litter? Not he. Pedro determined to ride away as the representative of a noble house should travel, and the count laughed and said that Pedro should ride by his side, that Petronilla and Fabien could ride in one litter and the other should be left for the Señora Velasco in case she should ever want to travel.

Their mother did not weep as they had expected she would do when taking leave of her children. On the contrary, there was a look of hope in her eyes as she whispered: "It is not for ever, my angels, so do not be grieved. I will pray to Saint Julian, the patron saint of travelers, to grant you a safe journey, and always remember, whatever happens while we are separated, that your mother is praying for you."

The twins received at the last moment a present from Lenoir.

"It is for both of you," he said, "and I hope it will amuse you and help to remind you of home." The present was a pretty squirrel in a cage of Lenoir's own making. In the cage was a wheel of wood which the little fellow seemed to enjoy whirling. The twins were very much pleased with this gift and thanked Lenoir over and over again.

Fabien did not take the whole of his menagerie away. It was out of the question to take the St. Bernard, which was now no longer a playful puppy, but a great, lumbering, full-sized dog. Gris, of

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whom the boy was tired, he presented to Jules, who had always treated the bird with great consideration since first he had heard him speak. Hour after hour the old man would gaze thoughtfully at the parrot, and when the bird would make a remark that seemed to have no bearing whatever upon his present surroundings Jules would nod to Olympie and say: "He means something by that, mark you! He has been thinking of something that worries him and he knows a great deal more than he says."

Maroc had been elected to stay with his master, who, in a fit of caprice, had insisted that the monkey should ride horseback behind Guillot, much to that young man's disgust. To carry a falcon on the wrist when riding was a fashionable thing to do, but to have a monkey behind one was disgusting, and Guillot slyly loosened the string in the hope that when he was riding under a tree Maroc would escape and scamper away to the forest. But the simian did nothing of the kind; he probably knew when he was well off.

Fabien graciously agreed that Lenoir's present should travel in the litter with Petronilla and himself.

When they had received the last embrace from their mother, had been pecked on the cheek by Aunt Catalina, had listened to showers of blessings from Tomas, Olympie and Jules, and had heard the final kindly admonitions from Brother

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François, the children took their places in the procession and began their journey. Until a turn in the road shut off their view of the castle they could see a white handkerchief waving from one of its windows; it was from the chapel window and the twins knew that their mother, as soon as she could no longer see them on the road, would invoke for them the protection of Saint Julian.

Pedro, being a boy and ashamed to cry, winked very hard to keep back the tears; but Petronilla, being a girl, wept profusely. Fabien watched her for some time in silence. He wondered if it was her intention to cry all day. He hoped not, for to be shut in a litter with a crying girl would not be pleasant. Finally he said: "Instead of crying like that you had better be thinking up a name for this squirrel. I always name my pets as soon as I get them. I have given him a nut and he knows what to do with it, I can tell you."

Petronilla raised her head and looked at the squirrel. He was sitting up and holding a nut in his paws. He looked so cunning in this position that she laughed and put away her handkerchief.

"It is true, he should have a name," she said. "And I do not know what to call him."

"Let us name him for a king,—one who is alive now," suggested Fabien. "Let us call him Henry, which would be for the King of Navarre and also for Henry the Eighth of England."

"I do not think Henry is a nice name for a

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squirrel and I should not want to name him for the King of England," returned Petronilla.

"Why not?"

"Because Tomas told me that King Henry chopped off his wife's head. I would not name a pet for any man who would do such a dreadful thing."

"You talk as if he had chopped it off himself, as Jules kills a fowl," replied Fabien contemptuously. "He was not near her when it was done; he simply ordered it to be done."

"What difference does it make whether he did it himself or whether he ordered it? It was all the same to her."

"Henry the Eighth is a great king," went on Fabien. "My grandmother saw him when the two kings met on the Field of the Cloth of Gold, and she says the English king was fine and handsome."

"I do not care if he was," said Petronilla, "this squirrel's name is not going to be Henry, and you can make up your mind to that."

"Then name him Francis, after my king; you know grandmama and I are going back to France some day."

"I shall not call him for the King of France."

"Now, why won't you?"

"Because my mother has told me about him and I do not like him at all. He was in prison in Spain and in order to be free he gave up his two little sons to be put in his place. And the poor

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little princes had been ill with measles and cared for by their aunt, our own queen, who was then in France. They were so glad to get out of their sick room,—and then right away they had to be shut up in prison with no more than a glance at the king, their father, who thought of nothing but his own liberty. My mother told me this and I know it is true."

"Women and little girls do not know anything about such things, Mademoiselle Petronilla," said Guillot, who was riding close to the litter and had overheard the conversation. "It made a great deal of difference whether the king was at liberty or not, and it did not make any difference about those two babies."

"They were not babies," returned the little girl stoutly; "the older was eight years old; it mattered something to you at that age whether you were in prison, I know. And my mother told me that all the good things the King of France ever did were suggested to him by our queen, and if that be the case he is not a great king at all, for anybody can take advice. I am not going to name my squirrel for the King of France."

The small animal which had caused this dispute meantime was munching his nut and apparently not caring whether he was called Henry, Francis, or Alexander the Great. "I know what to name him!" cried his mistress suddenly; "I shall call him 'Vif,' because he is so lively."

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"He is not my squirrel," replied Fabien coldly; "if he were I never should call him such a silly name as that."

"Well, he is mine, or, that is, he is half mine, and as Pedro always lets me do as I please about such things I say his name is Vif."

Fabien made no more objections, though he wished that Lenoir had given the frisky little animal to him, in which case he could have named him whatever he liked. A year ago he would have argued the matter fiercely and perhaps would have taken the squirrel from her by force and claimed it for his own; but the benign influence of Señora Velasco had not been without its good results, and though there still was much to be desired in his conduct, the last twelve months had really seen a great improvement in the little marquis.

Fabien now took a little bag of stones from his wallet and began to toss it from one hand to the other. "It will now be impossible for me to be ill," he said, "for every one of these stones is good for some disease. Tomas was out all yesterday afternoon gathering them for me."

"He gave a bagful to each of us, for we might be separated, you know," said Petronilla.

Fabien emptied them into his cap and looked the stones over. "That little red stone is the best thing in the world for toothache, your mother says, and Jules told me that if it had not been for that

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brown stone he knows he would have had rheumatism long ago."

"That is true," said Petronilla. "You see, Tomas has traveled a great deal, for he used to be a soldier, and he knows all about such things; so if you will keep the stones he gave you, you will be all right."

Children who read this will smile at the simple belief that just a stone that could not be taken inwardly, applied externally or used in any way except to be carried in the pocket, could cure disease. But in the sixteenth century this superstition was not confined to women and children and servants. Charles the Fifth, King of Spain and one of the wisest monarchs in Christendom, carried about with him a stone incrusted with gold to stop the flow of blood, a blue stone for the gout, a bazaar stone from the Orient to cure various maladies, and a philosopher's stone, which was supposed to cure everything and to make its happy possessor live for ever. As the philosopher's stone was expected to do all that could be accomplished by the other stones with additional improvements on its own account, one wonders why he needed the others. And we know that the gout finally carried him off in spite of the blue stone, which, ably assisted by the philosopher's stone, was expected to pay particular attention to that malady.

As the sun climbed higher in the heavens our travelers began to grow hungry, and they stopped

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at a queer little wayside inn like a peasant's cot, where they partook with a relish of cheese, black bread and milk.

The most enchanting of journeys grows wearisome at the close of the day and the children were not sorry when at nightfall they rode into the courtyard of an inn of some pretensions to size and comfort. As Count de Saint-Victor lifted Petronilla to the ground, he said: "You must be your own tiring-woman for to-night, little one. Tomorrow we shall join the Marquise de Tallanges at the château, where she is stopping with a friend, and she will provide some one to take care of you."

"Oh, I do not need a waiting-woman," said the little girl. "I have dressed myself and combed my own hair for a great many years."

The count laughed. "You are quite an old lady, it seems." He put his hand under her chin and raised her face. "In spite of those glinting locks which do not seem to belong to you, you are very like some one I know."

"And some one I know, too?" asked the little girl.

"One whom we both know—and love," he added, as if to himself.

"He means my aunt," thought Petronilla. "No one ever said that I look in the least like her, and I do not see why he should think I love her because he does."

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The servants were rushing about to prepare for the accommodation of the new arrivals, and as the two boys entered the main room together they noticed that a man who had been seated at the farther end of it rose from his chair and slouched from the apartment. In his excitement, Pedro gave Fabien such a pinch that the latter howled.

"What made you do that?" asked the little marquis angrily.

"Hush!" whispered Pedro. "Did you notice the man who just went out,—the one with the red sash twisted about his waist?"

"No, I did not, and why should I?" asked Fabien sulkily.

"I caught only a glimpse of his face," whispered Pedro; "but from what I saw of him, I am almost sure it was the man who tied us to the tree that day in the forest."

"Let us tell Uncle Jacques to make him give up my medal and then shoot him!" said Fabien, who did not believe in half-measures.

The count listened attentively to what Pedro had to say, but he was inclined to think that the boy was mistaken. "Did you get a good view of his face?" he asked.

"I saw only the left side. If I had seen the right side I should have known surely, for he had a scar from his temple to his chin. But he was dressed just like him and he wore a red sash."

"Red sashes are not uncommon, my boy; but

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come with me to the courtyard and if you see him anywhere about I will make the rascal sorry for the way he treated you."

Their search proved unavailing, for no such man could be found. A stable-boy said a man had just ridden away, but was uncertain regarding the appearance of the departing guest. No one had observed him specially, and when asked about the scar the landlord thought it possible; the stranger had come in with a number of others and he had scarcely glanced at him, but a scar was not a rare sight in those days when all men were accustomed to fight with sword or dagger. Anyhow, it appeared that the man with the scar had gone away for good, and it did not seem worth while to search further for him.

CHAPTER XIII

PEDRO AND THE CONTRABANDISTA

Never before had Pedro Velasco felt so proud and so grown-up. After supper he strolled out of the house and wandered alone in the moonlight down the path that led to the highroad. Ordinarily he would have felt a little bit timid about going so far alone at night, for one is not a man at eleven, when all is said and done; but he felt that a boy who could go out into the world to make a fortune for himself and his family should not be afraid of shadows. He was quite sure that the Chevalier Bayard had not been afraid of anything visible or invisible, when he had left his home to try his luck at earning name and fame.

It was a very fair and lovely night. The rim of the moon could be seen through the trees and a light breeze made the shadows dance across the path, while in a bush near-by a nightingale was singing as if he poured out all his joys and griefs in song. Pedro wished that his sister and Fabien had come with him instead of going to bed like babies as soon as they had finished supper. Then he remembered that the Count de Saint-Victor supposed him to be this minute asleep by Fabien's

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side, and he had promised to obey the count in all things.

He turned to go back, when a strange thing happened. Something large, like the wings of an enormous bat, enveloped him from head to foot, muffling him in such a way that his cry of fright was smothered into a faint murmur; then he was seized and carried away by some one on horseback.

The boy struggled with all his might, still striving to make himself heard, when a harsh voice said: "Keep still, or you will regret it. If you will be quiet not a hair of your head shall be touched and you shall be restored unharmed to your friends. I can not hold you if you struggle like that and—well, there are plenty of cliffs where a boy might be dropped over and the world be none the wiser."

The effect of this speech was to make Pedro keep very quiet indeed. But he did a great deal of thinking. Count de Saint-Victor would not know of his absence until morning, and where would Pedro be by that time? What could this man want with him? He could not be robbed, for there was nothing to take; he had left his purse, containing two bright gold pieces, with his father's dagger, on the table in his room, for he had begun to undress when the notion had seized him to wander for a little while in the moonlight and enjoy his independence. Why should any one want to take him from his friends? If robbery had been

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the motive the man could have looked for his purse and then left him on the spot where he had found him; and there was no other advantage to be gained from this unreasonable carrying-off of a boy against his will.

'After what seemed to be a very long time the horse stopped and Pedro could hear men's voices. The cover was taken from his head, but he could see very little save a few shadowy forms, the moon being behind a cloud.

"Trapped him already, eh?" asked a voice that seemed familiar. "Did you send the message to get him out, as I told you?"

"Not necessary," said Pedro's captor, letting the boy slip to the ground. "He came out of his own accord, just as if he had been expecting me, and I carried him away as easily as ever I smuggled a cask of rum."

"Well done, Diego! This shall not be forgotten when we obtain the ransom. Your doting grandmother and your own estate are good for a great many thousand crowns, are they not, my little Marquis?"

"I do not know what you mean," returned the boy wonderingly; "I am not a marquis."

"Oh, no, you are nothing now but a peasant lad; but the day we rode together you were a nobleman with your purse filled with gold. You talked of Madame la Marquise, your grandmother, and of the money she possessed."

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"You are the man who tied us in the forest," said Pedro; and his heart became as heavy as lead.

"Yes, Monsieur, at your service," replied the man mockingly.

"Please let me go! I have nothing for you to take, for I left everything in my room that you would want."

"Bah! a jeweled chain or such a matter is a mere bagatelle to me in comparison to what I shall get from your noble grandmother."

"I do not know what you mean. I have no grandmother. I believe you think I am Fabien. But I am not; I am Pedro Velasco, and there is no money in my family for anybody."

The man gave vent to an exclamation of wrath. "Did you bring the wrong boy?" he asked furiously.

"I brought the boy I thought was the marquis," replied the other; "strike a fire and see for yourself."

A fire of dry sticks was kindled and as the flame leaped up the man saw, not Fabien, the heir to a great fortune, whom he fondly hoped to have captured, but Pedro Velasco, the heir to almost nothing at all.

The man with the scar was so angry that Pedro trembled lest he should slay him in his fury, but his wrath seemed to be vented against the boy's captor. "After all our planning you have brought the wrong one," he said, "and now you have put

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them on their guard and we never can succeed in what we intended to do!"

"I thought it was the right boy," replied Diego sulkily. "The other one was a very common-looking chap, but this one looked like a marquis."

"You should not have depended upon looks," roared the other, "you should have inquired. Have you not a tongue in your stupid head?"

Diego answered hotly and from words they fell to blows. In the encounter the man with the scar received decidedly the worst of it, to Pedro's secret satisfaction.

The boy hoped that now, when they found there was nothing to be gained by keeping him, they would return him to his friends, and his heart sank when the man with the scar said: "Now that we have the little popinjay we might as well keep him. Perhaps his mother will be able to pay something for his ransom."

In vain Pedro protested, declaring that it would be impossible for his mother to pay a ransom. He was told to keep silent, which command was accompanied by a threat of violence. Soon they all lay down on the ground to sleep, one of their number, called Antonio, being appointed to watch their small prisoner to see that he did not escape on one of the horses in the night.

Antonio was not an unkind sentinel. He folded a long cloak so that a part of it answered for a couch and part for a cover for the boy and sat

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down beside him to keep watch as ordered to do by the chief of the band. The small prisoner was too unhappy to sleep. What would the Count de Saint-Victor do in the morning when he found one of his small charges missing? And Petronilla would go almost mad with grief, he was sure. He hoped they could keep the news from his mother as long as possible, and find his ransom money in some other way. And she had prayed to Saint Julian for his safety, poor mother!

Pedro's meditations were interrupted by a hand laid on his arm, and the sentinel whispered, "Do not go to sleep. When I am sure that the others are wrapped in slumber, you may come with me."

The boy's heart almost smothered him, it beat so hard from pure joy. He had felt that Antonio looked upon him kindly from the first and now he was going to help him to escape!

Soon all the men were snoring and, taking the boy gently by the hand, Antonio led him to where the horses had been fastened for the night.

Mounting one of them, he told Pedro to get behind him, and, riding slowly at first until they were out of earshot, they urged the horse to a gallop as soon as they reached the road.

After a while Antonio said: "I am doing something that would be very dangerous to me were I to return to that band again, but I never shall go back, for I am off to the wars. I am going to take you back to your friends. Can you guess why?"

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Pedro said he could not guess, unless it was because Antonio wished to be kind.

The man laughed. "I have not often done things just to be kind, but I never forget a kindness done to me. One night about six years ago I got an ugly wound in the leg, by whom or for what I will not tell you—for I am not a saint, you must know, and have risked my life many times. I went on my way as best I could, afraid that I should die from loss of blood, and, seeing a light in the windows of a castle, I knocked at the kitchen door. An old servant was about to dismiss me with some bread and meat, when a beautiful lady came into the kitchen with two little children at her side. The lady noticed my pale face and called me as I was about to close the door, for I was afraid she would suspect who I was, and I am not a man that many people would care to shelter.

"'You are ill, you are suffering, my friend,' she said in the softest voice I ever heard. 'Come in and let me see what I can do for you.'

"I gladly obeyed her, you may be sure, and, making me take a chair, she examined the wound and dressed it with her own pretty hands, her two little children standing behind her and peering at me with their large, solemn eyes. That lady was your mother,—you were one of the little children."

"I knew it was my mother!" said the boy with

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a catch in his breath; "you see, it was so like my mother to do that."

"Not only did she care for my immediate wants," went on the man, "she asked me to stay until I was better, and she did not ask me any questions. To her I was a poor human being in trouble and she was kind to me as an angel would be. Hers was almost the first act of kindness I had ever received, and I never have forgotten it. When I saw your face and heard your name I knew at once that you were the son of the lady who had befriended me, and I resolved to repay her by returning you to your friends."

Who can tell how even trivial events may shape themselves? Señora Velasco was accustomed to care for the sick and needy without a thought of reward, and little did she imagine when she tenderly nursed the outlaw simply because he was a suffering fellow creature that she was indirectly serving the golden-haired boy who stood by her side.

"I do not understand," said Pedro after a while, "how the man with the scar knew we were going to be at the inn."

"He heard in the village that you were going away and when you expected to go, and we had planned to make quite a sum of money out of the old marquise."

"Why did he not keep Fabien when he had him that day in the forest?"

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"Because he had not thought about it beforehand and there was none of his band near to assist him."

Kidnapping people of wealth and holding them for ransom was not uncommon, as Pedro knew, and he realized that wealth as well as poverty has its disadvantages.

The gray of dawn was stealing over the earth as they reached the inn and Antonio said, as the boy slipped to the ground: "Now run along to your friends, and may good luck go with you!" And before the boy could utter a word of thanks the outlaw put spurs to his horse and was gone.

The servants were up and at work, and the inn-keeper was bustling about, giving orders here and there and scolding a good deal. He stared at the pale and somewhat frowzy boy who entered at that hour of the morning.

"Rather early for you to be up and out, is it not, my little man?" he asked. "Where is the small marquis?"

"In bed, I suppose. I have been captured by smugglers, or robbers, because they thought I was Fabien." And Pedro related the particulars of his adventures.

The landlord was not indignant; he was completely and thoroughly disgusted. "I never heard of such a stupid thing in my life," he said. "The man who made that blunder ought to stay at home and scour pots and pans. Why did he not find out

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first which was the right boy, before he carried anybody off? Such idiocy is inexcusable!"

It seemed to Pedro that the innkeeper had not grasped the point of the matter. To him the robber's sin was not in taking the wrong boy but in taking any boy, and he watched mine host curiously as the latter took up an ale-mug and set it down on the table again very hard, looking as if he wished it had been somebody's head. An older person would have suspected that the innkeeper had been in the plot and had expected a share of the spoils, but Pedro was only puzzled.

Mine host, however, seemed to view the matter in quite a different light by the time he had discussed it with the Count de Saint-Victor. He declared that this crime of capture for ransom was growing entirely too common of late. At this rate things would soon arrive at such a pass that any honest man, who was known to have put by a few crowns for his old age, would be unsafe on his own doorstone, for the country was full of those Spaniards who, not content with smuggling, must needs, in their greedy quest of booty, disturb peaceable travelers on the king's highway.

Fabien urged his uncle to find the rascals and kill every one of them. "Just think what they wanted to do to me!" he said.

But the count replied that it would be useless to pursue the men, even were he prepared for such an expedition, as by this time they had no doubt

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sought their places of retreat in the mountains. "You should remember, Fabien," he added, "it is your fault that all this has happened. Brother François told me of your boastful words when you first made the acquaintance of the leader of this band, and of how you endeavored to make an impression by your rank and wealth."

"What is the good of having it if you can not talk about it?" grumbled his nephew.

"Wealth is to be used wisely and not to be bragged about, while noble blood should show itself by acts and not by boastful words which cheapen it," replied the count, adding more kindly: "But perhaps you should not be blamed so much, after all, for you are not, as Pedro is, blessed with a wise and saintly mother to guide you in all that you do."

"To hear him talk," remarked Fabien, when his uncle had gone to give directions regarding their departure, "anybody would think that you and Nilla were the only people who ever had a mother! I believe that he is kinder to you than he is to me, and it is because he is going to marry your aunt."

"He is kind to us because he is good to everybody," said Petronilla. "I love him very much and I am glad he is going to be my uncle."

CHAPTER XIV

PETRONILLA AND THE MYSTERIOUS WORD

Toward nightfall of the following day our party came in sight of a large mansion, or château, with battlemented walls and moat and drawbridge, for at this period people of rank and wealth were obliged to protect themselves from attack from every quarter and wished their houses to be as strong as forts. So moats, or deep ditches, were made around the buildings, and when the drawbridge was turned the inmates of the château were comparatively safe.

Petronilla was very glad when they had crossed the drawbridge, for she felt that here they would be safe from the outlaws; for, in spite of all that the count could say to comfort her, she had been fearing all day they would suddenly appear and recapture her beloved brother.

It was a great pleasure to see the good old marquise again. The old lady not only kissed and embraced her grandson until he ungraciously wriggled out of her grasp, but she kissed Pedro and Petronilla on both cheeks and vowed that they were even more beautiful than when she last had seen them.

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The Countess de Fleury, who was a lifelong friend of the marquise, was a tall lady with gray hair and was as much too thin as the marquise was too stout. She greeted the twins kindly and was much surprised to see that they bore so startling a resemblance to each other. She made them stand back to back, and, finding they were of exactly the same height, said it was because Petronilla was tall for a girl of her age, while the marquise good-naturedly insisted that it was owing to the fact that Pedro was small for his age. There were other ladies and a number of gentlemen in the company and the argument became general. Thus surrounded with chattering and laughter, the twins blushed very red at being the objects of so much attention; and when a pretty lady, declaring that whether or not he was too small for his age Pedro was the prettiest boy she ever had looked upon, kissed him on the forehead, that small gentleman lowered his eyes until his long lashes swept his cheeks, while the hot blood went to the very tips of his ears. "I will wait for you and you shall marry me when you grow up," said the lady.

"Then I shall wait for the sister," said one of the gentlemen. "Will you take me for a suitor when you are grown up, my pretty one?"

The girl was less easily embarrassed than the boy. She looked at her questioner and thoughtfully shook her head. "You will be too old for me and I do not like old men; or at least, I should not

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like to marry one. I think you will marry the lady who said she would wait for Pedro."

This reply was followed by a burst of laughter from the entire company save the pretty lady, who blushed and looked very much confused. But the gentleman said, "Truly, my little maid, you are an oracle!"

Petronilla felt that she had made a blunder, but she did not know in just what way and she was glad when the maid conducted her to her apartment.

The well-furnished room now occupied by Petronilla seemed to the little girl to be good enough for a queen and was a great contrast to her room at home, with the little couch beside which her mother had so often watched during the past weeks. The thought of her mother brought a lump into her throat, for it seemed to the little girl that they had been separated for ages, though it was only yesterday they had parted.

The maid went out and soon reappeared with a little gown of light blue silk, which she said was for Petronilla.

"It is very pretty," said the child, "but I am sorry to change my gown, for my brother has nothing like it and we always wear the same colors. It will seem strange to us to be different."

"Do not distress yourself about that, my little lady," said the smiling maid. "You will find that your brother, too, has changed the color of his cos-

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tume, for Madame la Marquise is anxious for you to be as much alike as possible."

While the maid parted and brushed her soft hair Petronilla's mind reverted to the remark she had made to the young gentleman down stairs, and the more she thought about it the more troubled she became. Her mother had cautioned her not to let her tongue run away with her prudence, and here at the very first opportunity she had been entirely too pert. The gentleman must have thought so, for he had called her a name which she never had heard and the meaning of which she did not know. "Oracle,"—what could the word mean? It must be another term for impertinence. Petronilla asked the maid, but she was uneducated and shook her head. "Perhaps it was the name of a branch of your family, and the gentleman had traced a resemblance in your features," suggested the maid.

"No, that could not be," replied Petronilla. "None of our family ever had such a name, or I should have heard my mother or my Aunt Catalina mention it."

"Perhaps your brother would know the meaning of the word."

"No, Pedro knows just as much as I do and just the things that I know."

"Well, I hope it means nothing very bad," said the maid; "but I am afraid that it does. I do not like the sound of it, somehow. You must have done

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something very naughty and have been very disobedient to have made him call you such a thing."

"I did not think it was so bad. A lady said she was going to marry Pedro when he grows up and a gentleman said he would marry me; and I said I thought they would marry each other."

"Well! No wonder he called you an oracle! Do you not know that you should not talk about their marriage to people's very faces?"

"He talked about marrying me and that would be my marriage, would it not? Did I not have just as good a right to talk to him about his marriage?"

"Oh, that was different. He was just in fun, you see."

"I do not think he was a bit kind," said the little girl, wiping her eyes. "He had no right to jest with me and as soon as I answered what I thought was right to call me an oracle! I am going to tell the Count de Saint-Victor all about it and he will take my part, I am sure of it."

As soon as she was dressed Petronilla started for the great drawing-room, and much to her delight she was joined in the hall by the count, who also was on his way down stairs.

"What a dainty fairy!" cried the count, taking her by the hand and turning her about to get a view of her gown. "Would that your mother could see you now!"

"I want so much to ask you something," said she

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shyly, still clinging to his hand. "I—I—have a trouble that I want to tell you about."

"Let us take a seat on this top step and together we will smooth it all out. But first let us protect the finery." He took a fine handkerchief from his pocket and spread it on the step, and then bade Petronilla sit down.

Then, leaning her arm on his knee in the most confiding manner, the little girl related the cause of her anxiety. "And I do not think it was a bit kind of him to call me such a thing," she concluded.

"Why do you object to being called an oracle?" asked the count, laughing. "Most people would be proud of the title."

"Does it not mean something bad?"

"Not at all. You know who the ancient Greeks were, do you not?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte, Brother François told us about them."

"The Greeks had oracles or statues which they consulted upon all occasions when they wanted to know what was going to happen. They thought, you see, that their gods spoke to them through the mouths of these figures and that whatever they said was sure to come true. So when Monsieur de Lisle told you that you were an oracle when you predicted his marriage with the young lady, he meant that that event certainly would happen; and, indeed, it is no news to any one who knows them. So now

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your mountain is swept away and is not even a mole-hill!"

Petronilla drew a sigh of relief. "I am glad it was nothing bad," she said, "but mama would not have liked for me to answer in that way, I think."

"Do as your beautiful mother advises about all things," replied the count, "and you will always do just what is right."

"She is beautiful," said the child wistfully; "she is prettier than any of the ladies here, I think."

"A thousand times more beautiful," returned the count earnestly.

The long oak table in the dining-room, at which the guests sat on stools and benches, seemed to creak beneath its weight of good things. There was roast kid, which at that time was so much esteemed that dishonest butchers sometimes sold lamb as kid, and there was an enormous thrush-pie, though it seemed a crime that the little songsters should be thus hushed for ever. There were the first pease the twins ever had seen, for that vegetable was deemed a royal dish and was little known; it was cooked with salt pork. There were wild strawberries, for not yet was that delicious fruit cultivated in the garden, nor did the berries have that rich fragrance which now clings to our fingers when we pick them from the vine, being simply a red, sweet berry and nothing more. In the château gardens there were now being culti-

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vated melons which were called "sucrins," because sugared water was poured over them while they were growing, to make them sweet!

After dinner there was dancing in a great hall, decorated with Flemish tapestry. The gentleman whose remark had so worried Petronilla asked her to dance, and although she was afraid she could not manage the step he led her through the figure, always taking her hand at the right time so that she made no mistakes. And Petronilla thought dancing the loveliest pastime in the world, especially when accompanied by such instruments as hautboys. Between the dances refreshments were served, consisting of sugared fruits handed about in silver dishes by pages.

As Pedro noted the richly-dressed ladies and gentlemen and heard the merry laughter about him he could scarcely believe that it was only last night he had been carried away by outlaws.

Fabien, to whom such scenes were not so novel, became sleepy and cross, but was cheered by the candied fruit. His admiring grandmother could scarcely keep her eyes from his face. "He always was a pretty dear," she said to a lady beside her, "but now he is handsome as a picture, and so healthy. I can only repay that dear Señora Velasco's kindness by my care of her own children."

"Is it always as gay among great people as it was to-night, Guillot?" asked Pedro as the valet accompanied the two boys to their rooms.

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"If you had lived at the court of France you would not think this anything at all," replied Guillot loftily. "The king thinks of some new amusement every hour; the whole court travels from palace to palace and, what with jousts and dancing, there is nothing like it."

"How happy they must be!" said the boy.

"Oh, as to happiness, that is quite another thing! Happiness is far more evenly divided in this world than you would think possible. Great ladies have troubles which almost break their hearts: their husbands, brothers, or sons are killed in battle or combat, while the gentlemen are worried by envy or troubles in money matters, for a coat of velvet and gold does not always mean a fat purse, by any means. So far as real joy goes, you perhaps had as much of it back there in that old owl's roost of a castle as you will ever know among the great. But you did not know what it was to live; you were simply vegetables."

CHAPTER XV

“THE MARGUERITE OF MARGUERITES”

The court of Navarre spent the winters at Pau and went to Nérac, a city farther north, for the summer. But this year the queen, who had been suffering from a troublesome cough, wished to prolong her stay beyond the spring months.

The children experienced a sensation of awe when they came in sight of the city, where lived the king and queen. Situated on a cliff it seemed to frown down upon the valley below, where that merry little river, the Gave, dashed under the quaint bridges with as much noise and impatience as if it had been a stream of great consequence.

Up the narrow road they went until they reached the palace, for the marquise, being one of the queen's ladies-in-waiting, lived under the same roof with her Majesty. Their first impression as they entered and were on their way to their own apartments was of a bewildering array of pictures, tapestry and beautiful furniture, for it has been said that few palaces of the sixteenth century possessed a finer collection of such treasures than this winter home of the Kings of Navarre.

And now the children were dressed with greater

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care than ever. A gown of peach-colored brocaded satin fell in shining folds to Petronilla's satin-shod feet, while her brother was clothed in a doublet and hose of the same shade. Fabien wore blue, which made him look quite sallow, but his grandmother, looking at the children with pride, said: "I do not believe that three prettier children can be found anywhere throughout the kingdoms of France and Navarre!"

"Pedro's hair is long and curls like a girl's; mine is short as the King of France wears his," said Fabien.

"Pedro's hair is as his mother likes it and I shall make no change in it, especially as it makes his resemblance to his sister still more striking. But as you are a gentleman of France, my darling, it is right that you should wear your hair in the fashion of the French court," said the marquise.

"And when my beard grows, which I hope will be before very long, I shall wear it pointed as the king does," said Fabien in a satisfied tone.

"How soon shall we see the queen, Madame?" asked Petronilla timidly.

"Are you impatient to see her?" asked the marquise good-naturedly.

"Oh, yes, Madame! I do want to see a real queen so much, and most of all, our own queen, for she is better than all the rest of them."

"That is a loyal little soul,—and I think she is speaking the truth, too," murmured the marquise.

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"My Aunt Catalina once saw the Queen of Spain," went on Petronilla, "and she said that looking at her face was like getting very close to the sun. Do you think, Madame, that we shall see our queen to-day?"

"I see no reason why you and your brother should not wait in the long corridor, where her Majesty will soon pass on her way from the chapel."

"Let Pedro go with me," said Fabien; "I am going with Guillot to see the soldiers drill."

"Pedro is going to remain with his sister; I want her Majesty to see them together," said the marquise with more firmness than she usually displayed toward her grandson.

Then the twins were conducted down a grand staircase, on the ceilings of which were medallions of the king and queen and their initials H and M intertwined on the walls. They were then told to sit in two high-backed chairs in the corridor, from which they were not to move until her Majesty appeared, when they were to rise and kneel as instructed.

At first the children amused themselves by looking about them. A round window of colored glass glowed like a jewel in the opposite wall, and hanging beneath it was a piece of tapestry which told the story of poor inquisitive Psyche, choosing the moment when that unreasonable young woman, anxious to see the face of the man she had

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married, was gazing at her sleeping husband. The little maid stood, lamp in hand, doubtless almost overcome with ecstasy at beholding the beauty of her lover, though his face as here depicted was not calculated to inspire rapture, being very pink and somewhat swollen. A drop of oil embroidered in red (probably to show that it was hot) was about to fall from the lamp to his face, and the twins, to whom Brother François had told the story, knew just what he would do when the oil struck his nose, which it seemed sure to do. This piece of tapestry looked very old and quite faded in places and Petronilla thought it odd when everything else was so handsome that the tapestry should be so shabby.

Pedro began to grow tired after a while and to wriggle about. "I wish I had gone with Fabien to see the soldiers," said he. "I was in no hurry to see the queen; Fabien says she is only a woman."

"You would not want to leave me here all alone, would you?" asked his sister.

"You need not be here yourself, for that matter. You could have remained with Madame la Marquise."

"Then I might not have seen the queen so soon."

"That does not matter; she would not vanish, like a *blanquette* from the mountain peak. You could see her to-morrow or the day after."

His sister made no reply; she did not feel particularly happy at this moment. It was very quiet

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and dreary here, she thought, and a sensation of homesickness came over her. There were voices in the distance, but no one came near them. A clock somewhere struck the hour in muffled tones as if it were afraid to express itself too freely, so different from the honest old castle clock which cordially and fearlessly bellowed its announcements. She tried to entertain herself by smoothing the folds of her gown and by contemplating the tips of her peach-colored shoes. Then she remembered that Brother François had often told her that she should not give too much thought to mere clothes, which serve to adorn only the perishable body, but that she should rather think of doing all in her power to beautify her soul.

"I wish the queen would come and get it over with," said Pedro restlessly.

"I think she will surely pass by pretty soon now," said Petronilla.

"How shall we know her when she does come?" he asked.

"Oh, that will be easy enough. She will have a long robe lined with ermine and she will wear a glittering crown."

Pedro took his hat from the floor and twirled it on the tips of his fingers until its white plume looked like a mass of foam.

"Do not do that; you will spoil it," said his sister.

"I do not think a palace is at all a pleasant place to be in," grumbled the boy, dropping his head-

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gear to the floor. "Your clothes are too fine to be happy in and there is nothing to do but sit in a corridor and wait for a queen to pass along. I wish I were at home in my old brown cloth suit! Would not it be fine if we could slip in and surprise them all this very moment?"

Petronilla nodded; it was dangerous to try to speak at present.

"I know just what they are all doing at this hour," went on the boy. "Tomas has taken Tonito for fagots and has stopped to gossip with Lenoir. Olympie is thinking about supper, for she always begins to think about it first. Aunt Catalina is saying her beads and our mother is busy with her needle."

"She is working at that lovely cope," said Petronilla, "and as she works her tears are falling on the seed pearls as they did the day before we left home. Oh, why did we not tell her before it was too late that we wanted to stay at home with her for ever!"

"It would have made no difference. She had promised madame, and our mother never breaks her word."

"Then, why did you not tell her in the first place that you would not leave home? I had to come because you came. It is all your fault that we are here," said his sister, feeling the melancholy comfort many of us experience in blaming some one else for our woes.

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"You know quite well why I came. I wanted to make a fortune for our mother and you and, yes, for Aunt Catalina; for I would give some of it to her, though she never has been kind to us."

"We did not need a fortune," wailed the little girl; "we were as happy as we could be as we were! Oh, I wish we had never come away from home!" And Petronilla began to weep, while her brother, leaning across the arm of his chair, clasped her about the neck and mingled his tears with her own.

Raising her head to find her handkerchief, the little girl saw a lady dressed in black approaching them from the other end of the corridor. "Some one is coming, Pedro," she whispered, wiping his eyes and her own. "How glad I am that it is not her Majesty!"

The lady was tall and very graceful; she wore no jewels of any kind and her gown, of soft, silken material, with widely-flowing sleeves, showed a little white frill at the throat. Her hair was entirely concealed by a close Béarnaise cap, the head-dress of the women of the country, and her costume was so plain, contrasted with that of the marquise and all the other ladies she had seen about the court, that Petronilla at first believed her to be a waiting-woman. But a second glance caused the child to feel instinctively that this surmise could not be correct, for there was something in the stranger's manner which told that she was a lady, a person accustomed to command. She

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was by no means beautiful. Her eyes were dark and shining and her mouth was small, but her nose was long and her complexion pale. She wore an expression of kindness and sweetness which, after all, is more to be desired than a pretty nose.

When they first observed her she was walking slowly, with her eyes cast down, as though absorbed in thought. When she saw the twins she smiled and paused beside them, saying in a soft, musical voice:

“You seem to be in trouble, little ones. Tell me what is grieving you.” She stroked Petronilla’s cheek with her slender fingers. “See, there are traces of tears here! Will you not tell me what has caused them, so that I may make everything right for you? Why,” she suddenly exclaimed, “you are just alike! There is not the difference of a hair between you.”

“Yes, Madame,” replied Petronilla, “we are alike; we are twins.”

“Surely. I had forgotten; you are the Velasco twins, of whom the Marquise de Tallanges was telling me. You are of a noble Spanish family.”

“Yes, Madame,” replied Pedro, “our father was noble; but our mother is an angel.”

“Bravo, my gallant little man!” said the lady. “But you must tell me what made you weep. Let us sit down and talk it over.”

The children had been standing respectfully before her, hand in hand. Pedro now drew his

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chair forward for the lady, while he and his sister took the other one, which was large enough for two.

The lady took Petronilla's hand in hers. "How old are you, my darling?" she asked.

"We are eleven years old, Madame."

"That is the age of my own little daughter."

"Is she in the palace? Shall we see her, Madame?"

"No, she is not here, I regret to say; but you have not yet told me the cause of your tears."

"It is because we were thinking about home," returned Petronilla. "It seems so long since we were there, and we should like so much to see our mother."

"Poor babies!" exclaimed the lady. "But why did your mother allow you to leave her? No mother should part from her children unless she is forced to do so."

"It was because Pedro wished to go out into the world and make a great name and a fortune, Madame, and our mother thought it would be best for him to go, as Madame la Marquise wished."

"I see,—sacrificing her own peace of mind for his good, poor soul! But could you not have remained at home to comfort her?"

"I could not be separated from my brother, Madame," replied the child simply.

The lady kissed her impulsively. "I can not

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blame you," she cried. "I, too, know what it is to adore a brother."

"Is he a twin brother who looks like you, Madame?"

"We are not twins," she answered; "I am two years the older. Yes, we are alike, but he is handsome; he is gracious; he is a hero! But tell me of your life down there in the mountains; were you happy there?"

Then the children told this gentle stranger all they knew of their short, simple lives. Of their mother, her kindness, her lovely black tresses that came almost to her feet; of Aunt Catalina; of Brother François, who taught them; of Tomas, Jules, Olympie, Lenoir and Tonito,—not one was passed over in silence. They even gave a minute description of Vif, the squirrel, with whom they were sure court-life would agree, for he was as lively to-day as ever and did not mope in the least.

"How my little one would enjoy that squirrel!" said their new friend. "She lately has had a present of some strange fowls, she writes me. She is very fond of pets."

"Do you think, Madame, that the queen will be coming along pretty soon?" asked Petronilla, breaking the silence which followed this remark.

"The queen? Were you waiting to see her?"

"Yes, Madame; but after all I am glad that you came instead, for you have cheered us and made us happy again. I hope you are living here,

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Madame, for if you will talk with us once in a while we shall not feel so lonely."

"Yes, I am living here and you shall talk to me sometimes if I am at leisure, for I am very busy usually."

Pedro wondered what this lady worked at. It could not be anything very laborious, for her hands were so white and smooth.

"How would you like to go far away from here to another palace and live with my little girl?" asked the lady.

"I do not know, Madame," said Pedro. "Our mother might not like to have us go far away from Madame la Marquise, who wants me for her page."

"Well, we need speak of it no more for the present. Meanwhile it grows late." As she spoke, she took a small, round object from the bosom of her dress.

"Oh, what a lovely little clock!" exclaimed Petronilla. This would seem a queer term for a watch, but it was the first one the child had ever seen. They were something new at this time and were not called watches, but pocket clocks. The lady laughed and laid the watch in the little girl's hand. It was a pretty toy. On the back of it was a sunflower set in topazes, with a center of black pearls, and underneath was the motto, *Non inferiora secutus*.

"Your priestly tutor taught you something of



Then the children told this gentle stranger all they knew of their
short simple lives

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Latin, you say," said their friend; "tell me what that means."

The boy studied it for a moment. "*I follow nothing inferior,*" said he.

"Right, my little savant!" said the lady admiringly. "I am more and more convinced that it will be well for you to join my daughter." She rose as she spoke.

"How I wish you need not leave us!" pleaded Petronilla.

"Oh, but I must go. I will send some one to show you through the gardens, and you shall come to the dining-room to-night, where you will see the queen and afterward the play. So do not feel lonely any more, for you see you have some pleasures before you."

The children thanked her with sparkling eyes. Now indeed were they to see something of court-life!

The lady nodded smilingly and moved away, and shortly afterward another appeared who was richly dressed and wore a great many jewels. "Come, little ones," she said, "her Majesty says that I must find some one to conduct you to the gardens."

"Who could have told her Majesty that we were here, Madame?" asked Petronilla wonderingly.

"Who but her own eyes?" laughed the lady.

The children thought this very strange and won-

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dered how the queen could have seen them when they had not caught even a glimpse of her.

"Who was that sweet lady in black who was talking to us a few moments ago, Madame?" asked Pedro.

"Do you not know who it was?"

"No, Madame."

"Have you not a little, little notion as to whom you were prattling?"

"No, Madame, we are strangers here and we know no one."

"Why, who should it be but Marguerite of Angoulême, called by her royal brother 'the pearl of pearls.' My dear children, you have been speaking with her Majesty, the Queen of Navarre!"

CHAPTER XVI

LIFE AT THE COURT OF NAVARRE

Pedro and Petronilla gazed at each other in horror and for the moment were speechless. Finally the latter said in frightened tones:

“And we did not kneel, or say ‘Your Majesty,’ or do one thing that we were told to do! Oh, I know she must be very angry with us!”

“Do not be frightened,” said the lady, smiling, “you had no means of knowing to whom you were speaking, and if her Majesty had wished you to address her as a queen she would have revealed her identity. Come, let us go.”

They walked down a long hall and the lady called a page, a boy some two years older than the twins, who was their guide to the terraces planned by the queen, which now were all a-bloom with the blossoms of spring. The page made up for what his queen had lacked in haughtiness of demeanor. He answered their questions as if every word were a jewel with which he was loath to part, looking extremely bored, meanwhile, as one who is doing something which is far beneath his dignity.

After they had been through the gardens he left

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them at a quick turn in the path and they would have felt somewhat dismayed had they not at that moment beheld Fabien seated on a stone bench under a lime-tree and Guillot standing behind him.

"I saw the soldiers drill and they were fine!" cried the former.

"And we saw the queen and she talked to us for a long time, while we did not know that she was anything more than a kind lady," said Petronilla.

"Did you do the things my grandmother told you to do?"

"No, we did not do anything but be polite. I tell you we did not know that it was her Majesty. How could we tell? She did not wear her crown."

"Everything about this court is tame," said Guillot. "Her Majesty does not dress like a queen here, but when she is at the court of her brother, the King of France, then she is magnificent."

"But is it not better to be a queen in Navarre than to be merely the king's sister in France?" asked Pedro.

"I do not think so and I do not believe her Majesty thinks so either. This is but a small country."

"It is large enough to be happy in," retorted Petronilla, who did not relish this slight offered to her native land. "I expect her Majesty does not care for dress, and when she is in her own country she can do as she pleases."

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"The reason," insisted Guillot, who would not have his opinions denied, "is because at Fontainebleau she is a great princess, while here she is a small queen. Think of it! She has but six mules to draw her two litters!"

"She is a great queen," maintained the little girl stoutly. "And I do not think it fair to judge people by the number of mules they own. A person might be very great and still not care very much about mules."

At this moment the haughty page returned with the announcement that the Marquise de Tallanges wished the children to come at once to her apartments.

The good marquise was one of those people who crave all the sympathy that can be offered in time of trouble; and they now found her dissolved in tears. One glance around the room made a verbal explanation of her grief unnecessary.

Maroc had been left fastened to a bedpost by a chain, for the marquise, having learned his little ways, would not permit him to range at will about her rooms. Left to himself, he became very restless. His chain would allow him to climb to the top of the bedpost, and this he did a good many times; but there is no real fun in climbing up and down a bedpost continuously or in walking round and round a circle not more than six feet from the bed. Maroc was growing very tired of it. Perhaps he, too, was thinking of Jules, who often gave him a

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nice little titbit, and was wishing himself back again in the castle.

Once more up the bedpost he went, and, sitting on the canopy that covered the top of the bed, he looked thoughtfully about for some means of amusement. On a table near the head of the bed was a tray of sweetmeats, a bottle of wine and a plate of biscuits, the occupant of the room being in the habit of taking an occasional lunch in the night. The monkey had tried his best to reach this table, for he, too, was fond of sweets, but unfortunately for him he was chained to the foot of the bed and his chain was not quite long enough to reach the dainties he so coveted.

On the dressing-table in the room beyond were wax candles in silver branches, six on each side. Maroc had often wondered how those candles would feel to the touch and if by any chance they were good to eat. It was very annoying to be chained up like this when there were so many fascinating things to investigate. He gave a swift and sudden jerk to his chain. This time the slender links broke, and without loss of time Maroc scampered to the floor, feeling that the world was his own.

He went first to the tray of sweets and popped one into his mouth. It realized his fondest expectations and he joyously consumed the remainder. The wine he did not care for. His young master once had given him a cupful in which a goodly

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quantity of red pepper had been sprinkled, and after that episode Maroc had no further use for the juice of the grape as a beverage; but wine, lovely red wine, is a very fine thing to amuse oneself with in other ways. Across a chair lay a handsome gown of lemon-colored brocade, which the marquise intended to put on that evening. This gorgeous piece of finery the little meddler pulled to the floor and poured the wine over it, delighted to see the crimson spots and splashes he was able to make on the thick goods. Perhaps he thought he was improving the gown and was doing the marquise a favor,—something she would have done herself if it had entered her mind. Let us give him the benefit of the doubt, and the credit for a good intention.

Next he climbed to the dressing-table, where stood those mysterious candles. They were soft and easily crushed. He tried them all and left ruin behind him. He picked up a silver jar containing a red paste which he often had seen the maid apply to the lips of her mistress. He was about to experiment with this new plaything when the door suddenly opened and the marquise appeared.

The simian received a cuff which he remembered for the rest of his life; then the old lady sank into a chair and burst into tears. She commanded her maid, who came in at that moment, to send the little page for the children.

“Just see what your pet has done!” she cried to

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Fabien. "I have humored you in every way and have allowed you to have everything you want, and this is all the thanks I get for it! This is by no means the first time that wretched animal has destroyed my property, but I promise you it shall be the last! My beautiful gown, which I intended to wear this evening, ruined for ever!"

"The little beast has eaten every one of the sugar-plums," said his master, looking regretfully into the tray.

"What are the sweets compared to my lovely gown?" cried his grandmother stormily.

The twins were greatly distressed to see their good friend so unhappy, and even Fabien ceased to grin. But the old lady gradually regained her usual calm and even smiled at the cause of her woes, who had climbed to Petronilla's arm, where he cuddled in mortal fear, wrapping a fold of the ample sleeve about him as if to protect himself from his enemy. He finally was sent from the room in the care of Guillot, who was instructed to whip him, but not too hard.

The twins were in a flutter of excitement at the thought of taking supper with her Majesty. "She knows we are of a noble family,—that is why she wants to see us there," said Pedro.

"No, I do not think that is the reason," returned his sister. "She is fond of looking at us because we are alike and because we are of the same age as the Princess Jeanne."

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“You will not take supper at the same table with the queen,” said the marquise, “but you will probably be placed at another table, which is presided over by her Majesty’s first lady of honor, the sénéchale of Poitou.”

The children were surprised to find that the supper was not so grand as that which had been served to the Countess de Fleury, for the Queen of Navarre did not believe, as many did at that time, that to eat was the sole aim of life, and her table was not furnished with the variety of viands which might be found in the homes of some of her noble subjects.

There were two tables in the supper-room, at one of which the queen supped alone, for the king at this time was away at Guyenne looking after his soldiers. Her Majesty looked toward the children with a bright smile, and during the meal one of her officers approached with a dish from her table. Helping the children to it, he said: “Her Majesty wishes you to try this viand,”—adding good-naturedly: “It is composed of cock’s crests and was brought to France by her Majesty’s royal niece, the Dauphiness Catherine de’ Medici.” The young and healthy appetites of the twins appreciated the dainty, about which Pedro determined to write to old Jules.

To the little guests the strangest feature of the meal was to see the people outside staring at them while they were eating, for it was the custom of

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the period for the common people to watch their sovereigns while they were at their meals.

When the supper was ended all went to a large drawing-room, or salon, where the queen motioned to the twins to stand behind her chair. There was music and the ladies and gentlemen took turns in telling stories and in making rhymes, for her Majesty was very fond of such pastime.

After a while a pretty lady took up a lute and, with a respectful courtesy to the queen, sang:

“O, welcome is he who at length
Shall stop at my door and shall cry:
‘The king to new health and new strength
Is returning, the king will not die!’
Then she who were now better dead
Will run the news-bearer to see,
And kiss him for what he hath said;
That her brother from danger is free.”

These lines, the marquise afterward told the children, were composed by the Queen of Navarre when she was on her way to see her brother, Francis the First, when he was ill in a Spanish prison.

Queen Marguerite now thanked the singer with one of her brilliant smiles and gave orders that the play should begin.

There was no scenery such as we see in the theater to-day, the play being acted by some of the queen's retainers on a raised platform at one end of the salon. It was a comedy written by the

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queen's own hand, and the children did not understand it very well, for it was about two women who were dissatisfied with their husbands. These ladies consulted a dame one hundred years old, who gave them good advice as a woman arrived at that mature age ought to be able to give.

The next play was given by the children of the royal chapel and amused everybody very much. There was a very stout captain who strutted about and bragged a great deal, and there was a man who was so anxious to display his learning that he was always getting himself entangled in long words, of which neither he nor anybody else could understand the meaning. But most interesting of all was a very wicked man who was always followed about by small demons. These demons were dressed in red and wore hats fashioned in three long peaks, one sticking straight up and the others standing out at either side of the head. The demons had a better time than anybody else, for they were in the habit of taking one another by the hand and dancing wildly, to the great delight of the beholders. At the end of the play they seized the wicked man and ran off with him.

CHAPTER XVII

QUEEN MARGUERITE'S PLANS FOR THE TWINS

The next morning the marquise said to Pedro: "Now, my little man, if you are to be my page I want you to begin your duties at once. I want some letters written, one to my sister at Poitiers, one to my cousin in Normandy and one to my tailor. It will be fine to have some one to attend to my correspondence, for it cramps my hand to write and I always stain my fingers with ink."

Pedro made a pen from a quill as he had been instructed to do by Brother François, and wrote the letters at the old lady's dictation. It was not an easy task, for at times she spoke so rapidly that it was difficult to keep pace with her and he was obliged to ask her to repeat her words; and at others he would wait for many minutes while the marquise, with her eyes fixed on vacancy, was struggling with her ideas in the effort to find something to say. The boy knew a half-dozen lines of a poem learned once as a task, which, he timidly stated, he always had thought would be good to put in a letter. Being asked to repeat them, he did so, and was told by the marquise to put them in, as they would be "good to help fill up," and

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Pedro added them as directed, though they did not seem to have much to do with the other matters mentioned in the letter. His employer was very well pleased with his morning's work and when he was through she embraced him most affectionately.

Señora Velasco had taught her daughter to embroider and the marquise, pleased to find that the child possessed this accomplishment, set her to work upon a cushion which she had begun and grown tired of some months before. Petronilla was fond of the work, with its seed pearls and its gold threads and bright-colored silks, and when the twins were employed during the morning the marquise glanced proudly at the two golden heads, one bent over the embroidery frame and the other over the writing-table; and while congratulating herself upon having discovered them, she sighed at the thought that it was more than probable she would be obliged to part with them soon.

Often when Pedro's work was done and the marquise had no more letters to dictate, the old lady, who was very fond of the sound of her own voice, as well as extremely good-natured, talked to the twins of the various happenings at the courts of France and Navarre.

Most of all were they interested in the little Princess Jeanne d'Albret, the daughter of their queen. "It is not strange that our mother was willing to part with us," said Petronilla, "for she

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is not rich and must do what seems best. But her Majesty could keep the princess here at court with her to be her comfort and her joy, as our mother says we always have been to her."

The marquise shook her head. "Even a queen may not always do as she likes, and her Majesty is entirely under the influence of her royal brother. When the little princess was not quite three years of age Charles the Fifth of Spain wished to betroth her to his son Philip. He promised our king that if this marriage should take place Spanish Navarre should be restored and the country would be united again."

"Our mother would be very glad of that, Madame," said Pedro, as the old lady paused for breath, "for Spanish Navarre was her native country. It was very kind of the King of Spain to think of it."

"My dear boy, kings never do anything of that sort just to be kind! And Charles would be the very last one to make any offer that did not have a deep motive behind it, for he is very crafty. The Princess Jeanne will one day be the Queen of Navarre in her own right. She will own the counties of Foix, Armagnac, Albret, Bigorre and Comminges, which are very rich, and Charles could well promise to give back a portion of his territory in order that Spain should have control of it all when the little princess should marry his son. He also wanted the princess to be sent to

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Toledo to be educated in order to have her grow up surrounded by Spanish influence.

"But this arrangement did not please the King of France, for he wished to have control of his niece and her possessions. He was afraid to allow her to stay at the court of Navarre, but wanted her in his own domains; so he had her placed in the castle of Plessis-les-Tours, where she is under his own eye."

"How the Princess Jeanne must hate the King of France for taking her away from her mother!" said Petronilla.

"No, quite the contrary. She always has been very fond of him and I believe her mother has taught her that the King of France can do no wrong. When she was a little child at the court of France the king petted her and she was very fond of him. Her own father also made a great deal of her and the people about the court named her the kings' darling. She was a dear little creature, pretty and a good deal spoiled, as was only natural with so much petting.

"The queen suffers greatly from being separated from her only child. One day three years ago, when her Majesty was in Paris, she received news that the Princess Jeanne was very ill. It was almost night and the rain was pouring in torrents. The queen could not find any one belonging to her suite, for they were in different parts of the city, not knowing that she would need them, and the

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litters in which she traveled had been stored for the winter. But her Majesty is resolute and allows nothing to stand in her way when she has once made up her mind; so she borrowed a litter and set out for Plessis that same afternoon. They stopped for the night at a little village, where the queen went immediately to the church, and, kneeling with her brow on the railing of the altar, prayed earnestly for the recovery of her child. It was not a question of queen or of princess then, it was a mother who humbly begged for the life of her little one.

“About two o’clock in the morning, when the queen, who could not sleep, was reading her Bible, she heard the sound of a horn, and that meant, you know, that a royal courier had arrived. Oh, how frightened the queen was when she heard the hoof-beats on the pavement! And when she heard him enter the courtyard of the inn she was almost mad with anxiety, for she knew he had come to bring her news,—whether good or bad she could not tell, though she feared the worst.

“She threw open the window and called to him, but her voice could not be heard. When the Bishop of Seez entered the room, Queen Marguerite was sure that her little girl was dead, and she knelt on the floor by the couch with her face buried in the folds of her mantle.

“When he came toward her, she said, ‘Ah, Monsieur de Seez, you come to announce the death of

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my only child! You need not speak, I well understand that she now stands in the presence of her God.'

"But the bishop said no; the princess had been pronounced out of danger. He even had a note brought by the courier and written by the princess' own hand, stating that she was better. And you may be sure that her Majesty had never received a jewel, not even the crown of Navarre itself, that made her so happy as that little scrap of paper which assured her that her child was still in the land of the living."

"I think mothers must be the same, whether they are queens or not," said Petronilla, wiping her eyes.

"Good mothers are the same all the world over," replied the marquise.

"And did her Majesty return to Paris, Madame, when she found the princess out of danger?"

"Not she! She continued her journey to Plessis-les-Tours, where she remained with her daughter until she was once more well and strong. But the most important journey Queen Marguerite ever undertook," went on the marquise, "was when she went to Spain at the time her brother was in prison there."

"He was taken prisoner at the battle of Pavia," said Pedro; "I heard Guillot talk of it."

"Yes, and it must have been a severe blow to the proud king to be obliged to give up his sword and

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his armor, to be kept for ever by Spain with other trophies of war."

It may be said in passing that if any of the readers of this story ever should visit Spain they will find the sword and armor of Francis in the royal armory of Madrid. The armor is of steel inlaid with gold, and is kept as brightly polished as on the day it was last worn by the king of France.

"The queen found her brother very ill and discouraged when she visited him," continued the marquise, "but she cheered him by her presence, and she must have seemed like a gleam of sunshine in his gloomy sick-room.

"She was not at all afraid to talk with the great King Charles the Fifth, but told him roundly what she thought of the way he had used her brother. During her stay there she did everything in her power to bring about the marriage between Francis and the sister of the Spanish king, which, you know, afterward took place. Oh, there is no doubt that Queen Marguerite is the most wonderful woman in Europe to-day."

Just as the marquise finished speaking a messenger came to the door with the information that her Majesty wished Monsieur and Mademoiselle de Velasco to come to her withdrawing-room.

The children rose hastily and with some trepidation. They had been in the palace for three weeks, but the queen, who seemed to be very much engaged, had not spoken to or sent for the twins

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since the day of their arrival. The good marquise smoothed their hair with her own hands and said, "Go, my dears; it has come at last as I expected it would."

The children wondered why she should speak in this manner, which made them very uneasy. They were quite pale when they knelt at the feet of her Majesty to kiss her hand.

"You seem agitated," said Marguerite, smiling upon them. "What is the matter?"

Petronilla, who was always the first to find her tongue, said: "We are afraid, your Majesty, that we have been doing something wrong, though we do not know what it can be."

"Why should you think that I sent for you to punish you?" replied the queen. "I am not so cruel, I hope."

"Every one tells of your Majesty's goodness," said Pedro, "but Madame la Marquise was sad when your Majesty sent for us, and we did not know—" and the boy hesitated.

"Oh, you did not reflect that what might be sad for the Marquise de Tallanges might not be so terrible for you," said the queen, smiling. "You may recall that the day I spoke with you I asked if you would like to live with my daughter, the Princess Jeanne of Navarre. I am afraid you will not like it so well there as here, for Plessis-les-Tours is a gloomy place, and that is why I want merry companions for my darling child. You

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shall go there and be her companions, her playmates.

"She has a hot temper and may sometimes strike you in a fit of anger, but she will be sorry for it afterward, for she has a kind little heart, and in the main she will be good to you. I could command you to go even against your will, but I do not think I need to do that, for I am sure you will be willing to join a lonely little girl who is separated from her parents and who can not at present enjoy the pleasures to which her rank entitles her."

Petronilla turned her eyes on her brother in a mute appeal for him to make a reply.

"We will go willingly, your Majesty," said the boy simply. "Whatever our queen orders must be right."

"That is as a loyal subject should reply, and I will promise to look out for your interests as long as it is necessary; and should you quit the service of her Highness it will only be to enter another as good."

The twins were quite unhappy when they had left the gracious presence of the queen. They did not want to go to another strange place just as they were beginning to feel at home at the court of Navarre and they did not want to say good-by to the kind marquise, of whom they were very fond. They did not care to part even with Fabien, who, although he continued to be more or less disagreeable at times, possessed a share of their friendship.

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They heard a burst of gay laughter as they left the queen's presence and, standing in an archway, they beheld the Count de Saint-Victor, surrounded by ladies who were chaffing, tormenting and fluttering their fans at him in a way the children thought must be very bewildering; but the count merely laughed, and he even caught the hand of one lady and took her fan from her, holding it high above her head so that she must beg for it in order to recover it. The children wished for an opportunity to tell him their woes, but they dared not disturb him at present. As soon as he saw the twins, however, he returned her fan to the lady and came toward the children.

"Why those melancholy looks?" he asked, as he gave a hand to each. "Has my friend, the marquise, been scolding you?"

"Oh, no, Monsieur," replied Pedro, "but we are in trouble, and when you have time I want to tell you about it."

At this moment a page came from her Majesty's apartment with a message for the Count de Saint-Victor. To the children he said: "I will meet you in the garden in a little while, and you shall tell me your troubles."

"I do not know what charm these children bring to bear upon the count," said one of the ladies, "but he will leave us at any time to go to them." As she spoke she took a box of confitures from the bag that hung from her girdle, and, dividing its

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contents between the two, she told them to go to the terrace and wait for the count.

Pedro and Petronilla took a seat under one of the orange-trees that bordered the walk, and by the time they had finished their sweets the count joined them. "I am to have the pleasure of conducting you to Plessis-les-Tours," he said, taking a seat between them.

"Oh, how happy I shall be if you will stay with us there!" cried Petronilla, clinging to his arm.

"That would be impossible, my child," he said, patting her hand. "When I have seen you safely to your journey's end I must away to Paris, where the King of France needs me, or thinks he does, which amounts to the same thing. But you must bear up and be patient, and who knows but that your mother may come to see you some time? I fancy she will."

He spoke so confidently that the children felt very much cheered. Then he told them about the castle of Plessis-les-Tours, where the little princess lived. He said it was an old château surrounded by moats and drawbridges, that it had dungeons and triple walls and had been the favorite retreat of Louis the Eleventh, the king who was so gloomy and so cruel and caused his enemies to be hanged to the limbs of the forest trees, though he pretended to be very pious and constantly prayed to the little images in his hat. But the count said the apartments of the little princess were very

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handsome ; that she had her pets and everything to make her happy, and that he was sure they would be contented there.

They remained in the garden with the count for some time and when they returned to the apartments of the marquise they found her dissolved in tears, as she had been on the day of Maroc's escapade. Thinking that the monkey had been doing some further damage they looked about them, but could not see any evidences of mischief.

"Oh, my dears, my dears," she cried, wiping her eyes at last, "we must all go to Plessis-les-Tours!" Then she told them that she had felt from the first that the queen would want them to go and live with the princess.

Although she did not say it, this was really the reason she had brought both of them to Pau, for the good marquise was like every one else about the court, anxious to please the queen. But she had not expected that she, too, would be asked to go to Plessis-les-Tours.

"Her Majesty says she wants the princess to be surrounded by cheerful people, and that is why she wants me to go ; she says I am always so gay," groaned the old lady between her sobs, looking anything but gay at that moment. "But I am getting along in years, and I am very comfortable in the company of the ladies here, of whom I am quite fond, and I do not want to change."

"I think it will be fine," said Fabien, who had

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entered while his grandmother was speaking. "There is a good long journey to take in the first place, and we can see something of the world. And Guillot says the King of France sometimes goes to see the Princess Jeanne and that they all go hunting together. When I grow up I shall live at the court of France, and I mean to go hunting every day of my life."

"Oh, I am glad so many of us are going!" said Pedro. "Why, there will be Madame la Marquise, and you, Fabien, and Guillot and Félice, and we shall not be all by ourselves as we had expected to be."

The marquise dried her tears and laughed at some remark of her grandson's, for she thought him the wittiest person, as well as the most beautiful boy in the world. Then, as they were to start on the following day, she began to give Félice a great many directions regarding their luggage and confided to Petronilla that on the day the King of France should come to Plessis-les-Tours she was going to wear a gorgeous robe of mulberry-colored satin, the sleeves slashed with white, which she would order immediately from Paris, so that it would be finished in time.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PRINCESS JEANNE OF NAVARRE

They set forth this time with quite an escort of soldiers, for it was a trip ordered by the queen, who had troops at her command and, moreover, the journey was a long and dangerous one and it was necessary that they should be well guarded. In these days of railways the journey from Pau to Plessis is a short one, but at that time it required many days, and although it was not uninteresting all were glad when it was finished.

It was twilight when they came in sight of the old castle of Plessis-les-Tours, which appeared gloomy and like a prison with its black turrets outlined against the sky. It was a strong fortress in the time of Louis the Eleventh, who was always afraid of danger, for tyrants are always cowards. They went over a drawbridge which rose after they had passed, and they felt completely shut off from the outside world, which after all is not so dreadful to contemplate when that outside world has danger in it.

The children wished to retire as soon as they had supper, for they were very tired and it was understood that they were not to see the princess until morning.

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The maid had just unfastened Petronilla's gown to prepare her for bed when a message came from Madame de Silly, who was the chief lady-of-honor and governess to the princess, requesting that Mademoiselle de Velasco should come to her. The maid hastily refastened the gown and gave a little pat to the child's hair, and the latter followed the messenger from the room.

Madame de Silly, a lady apparently about the age of the Queen of Navarre, smiled in a kind manner as she took Petronilla's hand. "I know you must be fatigued after your long journey, little one," she said, "and it seems cruel to keep you from your bed. But her Highness has taken a fancy to see you at once and she will not wait until morning. She has been a very lonely little girl of late. When her Majesty was last here she took away in her train Mademoiselle de Rohan and Mademoiselle de Gramont, playmates of her Highness, and for whom she entertained a deep affection. The departure of those two and of her mother, whom she adores, threw her into such a state of melancholy that I feared for her health. She begged to go to her parents, although we told her over and over again that her desire could not be granted. Then she implored us to write to the King of France and obtain permission for her to reside at his court, but this we did not dare to do, because it is at his command she is here. She would not resume her studies with

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Monsieur de Bourbon, who teaches her the languages and poetry, and she will weep in her room for hours at a time. This is why you children are here to be her companions, to cheer her and to overcome her melancholy. And you are most lucky to be appointed to the position, for the greatest nobles of the realm have considered it an honor to have their daughters selected as companions to the Princess Jeanne."

"But, Madame," said Petronilla, "my dress is not suitable; to appear before her Highness I should have one of my prettiest costumes."

"That does not matter. There is no time to make a change in your toilet and she wishes to see you as you are. She is in bed and the fancy has seized her to see you before she sleeps. Come."

They entered a large room which was furnished with splendor, for the King of France spared no expense in surrounding his niece with beautiful objects. But Petronilla paid little attention to the gilded furniture or the rich tapestry, so agitated was she concerning the coming interview.

At the farther end of the room was a large bed covered by a canopy and adorned with hangings that fell about a third of the way from the top, showing in the candle-light the glint of gold in their embroidery. On the bed, half-reclining in the midst of huge cushions, was a childish figure with a pale little face, large dark eyes and flowing locks half-concealed by a nightcap. Petronilla's

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ideas of royalty here received another shock. She had supposed that queens and princesses always wore their crowns and coronets; but she had seen the Queen of Navarre in a Béarnaise bonnet, and here was the future ruler of that country in a nightcap, a silk one, but still a nightcap.

"Go forward and speak to her," whispered Madame de Silly to the little girl, who advanced shyly and stood on the raised step at the side of the bed.

Petronilla kissed the little hand which was extended to her, and waited for the princess to speak.

"I was anxious to see you," said the small lady in a high, clear voice, "and I could not sleep until they brought you to me. I have a letter from the queen, my mother, which says that you are different from the children I have known and that you will amuse me."

"Yes, Madame," murmured Petronilla, "and my brother and I have brought you Vif, our squirrel, which we are sure will make you laugh."

"Oh, that is good! I love pets and I am sure I shall like you. Oh, how I hate this castle! Do you know there are iron cages in the courtyard where King Louis the Eleventh used to shut men until they died, and there is the river where he caused so many people to be drowned. In the great hall where my uncle was married to the Princess Claude I can think of nothing but the people who



And here was the future ruler of that country in a nightcap



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used to go there so long ago and kneel at the feet of Louis to beg for their lives. Ah! if I could only go to my mother or to the court of France, where everything is gay and everybody is happy!"

"Brother François always told us that no one ever is really happy in this world and that we must make the best of the pleasures we have while we are here, if they are innocent joys, and that we must try to be contented."

"Do not tell me what a monk preached to you," said the princess somewhat fretfully. "Tell me instead about the squirrel."

So Petronilla told her all of Vif's tricks and even of Tonito, who, she was sure, would miss her and her brother, and pretty soon Jeanne laughed gaily, which delighted Madame de Silly, who declared that the visitor had done the princess good already.

"I am sure I shall like you," said her Highness again as she bade the little girl good night; and turning her head on the pillow she was asleep before they were out of the room.

"I am pleased to see her go to sleep," whispered her governess, "for she has rested but poorly of late."

As for Petronilla, she fell asleep while the maid was undressing her and dreamed that she was in her own little bed at home, where a Madonna bent over her who proved to be her mother.

The following morning Pedro was notified that

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Madame de Silly wished to see him, and at the same time a servant was sent to his room to fetch Vif in his cage. "Come with me to the apartments of her Highness and bring the squirrel yourself, for it is your present and it is fitting that you should tender it with your own hands," said the governess, adding: "We have not told her of your resemblance to your sister, as we wish it to be a surprise."

The princess was seated in a large chair at the end of the room and at first she saw nothing but the squirrel. Vif leaped from one side to the other of his cage and whirled the wheel about as if he knew he was performing before the princess and wanted to do his best.

Her Highness gave a cry of delight and watched him for some time; then she raised her eyes to Pedro's face, for the boy had been standing respectfully before her. "Oh, it is the little Béarnaise," she began, then stopped suddenly. "Why do you wear a doublet and hose like a boy?" she asked discontentedly.

The ladies about her smiled and Madame de Silly said: "This is Pedro Velasco, twin brother of the little girl whom you saw last night, your Highness. They are, as you see, very much alike."

Jeanne was amazed at the resemblance and immediately sent for Petronilla, that she might compare the twins. She became very affable and grew so cheerful in the presence of these bright

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new faces that the ladies of the court nodded approvingly at each other as if to say, "Now our little charge will be cured of her melancholy."

"You must come and see my pets!" cried the princess after a while, and they all went down to the courtyard and through a side entrance, where she showed them some rabbits and a dozen large fowls which lately had been sent to her. These fowls were the first of the kind that had been seen in France. There were six males and six females. They were a curiosity to the people of that day, but similar ones now appear upon our own tables on Thanksgiving, Christmas, or any time when we want a particularly good dinner, for they were nothing more or less than turkeys!

Crossing the courtyard, the princess paused to speak to a tall, strong man, who proved to be her falconer.

All families of wealth and distinction kept hawks, or falcons as they were called, those birds being used in the chase for catching all kinds of small game, such as hares, kites and herons. The Princess Jeanne had a number of them in which she took great delight, for she was fond of hunting. Much trouble was taken to teach the birds to obey the falconer.

When the dogs had started a bird the falcon was allowed to soar upward and catch his feathered prey, and when he had captured it he was permitted to eat a part of it to encourage him to

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continue the deadly work. It was a cruel pastime, but not more so than some of the sport of the present day, and it was much enjoyed by those who engaged in it. It was the fashion for ladies and gentlemen to carry a bird on the wrist, and the bird carried thus was a mark of noble birth. When the master fought in battle the servant held the bird and in case the owner was made a prisoner the bird, according to the laws of chivalry, must be set free.

The falconer of Plessis-les-Tours seemed to be very much pleased because his small mistress had stopped to ask about the hawk he carried. Over the fourth finger of the hand on which it rested he had placed a queer little hood, made of leather and trimmed with scarlet velvet; while on the top of it was a tuft of feathers. The purpose of this hood was to blind the bird so it would not fly away at inconvenient moments. This particular falcon had taken a violent dislike to her hood, the falconer explained; she was afraid of it and he was carrying it about on his hand so that by constantly seeing this gay piece of headgear she would grow accustomed to it. He took a piece of meat intended for her breakfast and, as Mistress Falcon was about to take a bite, he dragged the hood over it and prevented her from getting even a small taste. She threw back her head in a startled way as if to say, "Am I never to see the last of this tiresome hood?" But her master dragged it over

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and about the meat until at last the meat fell into the hood, and in her anxiety to get at her long-delayed breakfast the hawk thrust her head into the obnoxious piece of headgear, forgetting its gaudy trimmings and its smothering effect in her eagerness to satisfy her hunger. The falconer said he now thought she would no longer be afraid of it and would be willing to wear the hood whenever he wished her to do so.

The princess was very much interested in this performance and historians tell us that as a child she could hood a hawk as deftly as the falconer himself.

Returning to their rooms the party passed through the front of the building, along which ran a cloister which seemed to add to its solemnity and gloom. Then they climbed an elegant staircase on the summit of which was a room where Charles the Eighth passed many a lonely hour when a child, neglected by those who should have loved him.

Pedro was not unhappy at Plessis-les-Tours, for he had found a source of joy to be obtained by all where books abound. He was fond of reading, though there had been few books in his home save the lives of the saints and other works of that description; but here was a library which belonged to the king of France. These volumes had been placed on the shelves for the king's entertainment when stopping at the castle, and Francis

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perused them when tired of being amused in other ways. They were bound in morocco and sprinkled over with the fleur-de-lis in gold, and across some of them was a gold salamander. The fleur-de-lis, you must know, is the flower of France and the salamander, a kind of lizard supposed to live in the fire, had been chosen by the king as his device.

Finding Pedro one day looking longingly at these books, Jeanne told him he could read such as interested him if he would be very careful of them. No one who truly loves books is inclined to abuse them and Pedro handled these volumes as if they had been precious jewels. Here the boy read legends of Charlemagne, that king who was so tall and strong that it is said few men of to-day could handle his sword; and he read of Arthur and his Round Table, of the knights who did so many deeds of valor, of the exploits of Richard Cœur de Lion and many other tales of adventure. Nothing that passed in the castle had a greater attraction for Pedro than these books, and with one of them on the table before him, with an elbow resting on either side of it and his head supported by his hands, the boy was deaf to all that passed around him. He felt that the stories themselves belonged to him as much as they did to his Majesty, for once fixed in his memory they never could escape him; and Francis himself could say no more.

But Petronilla was not contented at Plessis-les-

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Tours. She could amuse herself very well during the day, but she was very lonely at night. Her room was so large and so gloomy it seemed to her that the dark, heavy hangings of the huge bed would shut out the angels that her mother had told her would keep guard over her at night.

There was a piece of tapestry on the wall representing a grotesque dwarf, and if she woke in the night she could see by the dim light left in the room this ugly being winking and blinking and making faces at her. Then the owls shrieked in such a doleful way they made her blood curdle. Of course she knew they meant no harm by it, and that owls must shriek occasionally to relieve their feelings; but hearing them here, all alone as she was, with no mother in the next room to comfort her when she was frightened, the effect was very doleful. The little girl wished that she had never heard of Louis the Eleventh and of the men he had hanged in the forest, for such things are not pleasant to ponder about after one has retired at night. If the Count de Saint-Victor had not gone away the day after their arrival she would have complained to him of her loneliness at night; but now there was no one to whom to confide her woes with any hope of having them banished. Help came at last from an unexpected quarter.

One night, dreading to enter her room where the maid was waiting to undress her, Petronilla sank into a little heap on the floor outside the

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door and began to cry. She did not want to go to bed,—she wanted to go home and see her mother. She was so homesick she felt that even one of Aunt Catalina's well-remembered cuffs on the ear would be almost welcome. As she was sobbing and telling herself in her own mind that she was the unhappiest little girl alive, Fabien came swaggering along the hall, taking up by his stride as much room as could be filled by one boy of his size. Fabien was not a favorite with the princess, though she tolerated him because she was fond of his grandmother. And the boy was not an enthusiastic admirer of the princess. In her presence he was obliged to be quiet and respectful, and Fabien was never quite happy when he was behaving himself.

"What is the matter? What are you crying for, great baby?" he asked, pausing beside Petronilla.

"I—I—want to go home! I want to see my mother; and I do not want to go to bed," she replied, struggling to keep her voice from becoming a loud wail of misery.

"You are too big a girl to want your mother," replied he with a swagger.

"No girl ever is too big to want her mother," retorted Petronilla, wiping her eyes; "no, not if she is old and gray."

"If she is old and gray she is not a girl," observed Fabien. "But why do you not want to go to bed?"

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"Because this room is so big and so lonely, and I can not help thinking about Louis the Eleventh."

"What makes you want to think about that sort of thing?" asked Fabien contemptuously. "Did you not get enough of history with Brother François without letting it worry you after you go to bed?"

"You can say what you like," said Petronilla, "but it is no disgrace to think of him. Her Highness says she thinks about King Louis a great deal and of all the people he caused to be drowned in the river and hanged to the forest trees and shut up in cages. Why, at the end of the terrace walk there is a vault where a cardinal was shut up for eleven years for telling the king's secrets!"

"Well, I expect he deserved it. People have no business telling other people's secrets. I never do."

"When I go to bed, Fabien, I can not help thinking of all these terrible things."

"King Louis is dead and has been a good many years," replied Fabien, showing more common sense than he usually displayed. "He can not drown you, or hang you, or put you in a cage; and nobody else is going to do it. So why cry your eyes out about something that can not happen?"

"But my room is so big and so lonesome!" sobbed the little girl, refusing to be comforted.

"I'll tell you what you can do as well as not," said the boy. "There is a room in my grandmother's suite you can have. It is next to her bed-

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room and you can leave the door open at night. She will not mind."

"But her things are there and she uses it as a dressing-room."

"She can take her things out, then," replied Fabien confidently. "Never you mind, I will fix it all right. I will tell her that I can not sleep for thinking about you, because you are so lonely, and she knows that loss of sleep makes my head ache; and after that she would give you her own bed if you wanted it."

"But that would not be true and you shall not tell her a falsehood on my account. Why, Brother François—"

"Oh, who cares for Brother François! And it would be the truth. If I want to I can stay awake to think about you and it would give me the headache, too. Come along, we will ask her about it this minute."

"No, no, I can not. Félice is waiting to undress me."

Fabien peeped through the door. "Félice is asleep and snoring. Come."

"But my eyes are red, I know."

"I know it, too, and so is your nose for that matter; but who cares?"

And without more words he grabbed her by the wrist and pulled her along to his grandmother's rooms.

"Here is Nilla, who can not sleep and is lonely

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on account of Louis the Eleventh!" cried Fabien, bursting into his grandmother's room and announcing the object of his visit in the same moment.

"Oh, my darling!" said the marquise, who was looking through her jewel-box and laying its contents one by one against a piece of crimson taffeta to see which would go with it best. "My dearest boy, you are so impulsive! When will you learn not to enter a room if as you had been shot from an arquebus? But what is the matter with Nilla, and what has she to do with King Louis?"

"Indeed, Madame, it is not by my own will that I am here," said the little girl.

"But it is by mine," declared Fabien. "She is lonesome away off there by herself, and I want her to have this room next to yours."

Fabien did not need to add the little fiction about the headache, for his grandmother was delighted to see that he had a thought for the comfort of another. "What a kind heart you have, dearie!" she said. "There are few boys who would be so thoughtful. I rather liked that little room as a dressing-room, but I can use the one on the other side and I shall have a bed put in it to-night. It is too bad to have Nilla sleep so far away from me; I was very, very careless not to think of it before."

So from that time Petronilla slept next door to the marquise and when she woke in the night the old lady's loud breathing was music to her ears,

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for she knew there was a human being within speaking distance and she was no longer afraid. The incident also shed a new light upon Fabien's character, showing that the boy was not altogether selfish, as she had supposed him to be.

CHAPTER XIX

THE VISIT OF FRANCIS THE FIRST

The weeks passed peacefully on. The Princess Jeanne was happy with her new companions, who often made her laugh, while she had a better appetite than formerly and could now fall with ease into the natural sleep of childhood. But she did not dream of the trouble that was being brewed for her at this time by the King of France, with the consent of her royal mother, for the king's sister agreed with him fully upon all subjects.

The little princess was soon to learn the plans which had been made for her future. One fine morning when it pleased Jeanne to work at her embroidery, surrounded by her ladies engaged in the same occupation, the sound of a horn was heard in the courtyard below, and with a cry of delight the princess sprang to her feet and ran to a window.

“A royal messenger!” she cried. “He brings news from the king, my uncle.”

This was indeed the case. The king had been stopping for a time at his palace of Amboise and was hunting that day along the banks of the Loire.

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The royal messenger brought the news that his Majesty was pleased to pay a visit to the Princess Jeanne, and was even then on his way to the castle of Plessis-les-Tours.

Everybody under that roof was excited, from the lowest scullion to the haughtiest maid-of-honor, and little Jeanne was in an ecstasy of delight, for she loved her uncle and she hoped he would bring her some good news,—the best of which would be that she should join her parents, and the next best that she should go with her suite to the Court of France.

The marquise was busily engaged in putting on, with the assistance of her maid, the gown she had ordered for the occasion when the king should honor his niece with a visit; and, in fact, all the ladies were putting themselves in gorgeous array, each striving to look her very best.

Finding they were not needed, or even remembered by anybody, the twins slipped away. They mounted a dozen steps of a spiral staircase that led to a window commanding a view of the courtyard and there awaited the coming of the royal party.

"This is not the first time we have waited for people to come from a distance," said the little girl. "The first was Monsieur de Beaurepas. What a wonderful thing his coming was to us! And now we would not look out of the window to watch for just a common doctor! Afterward we

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watched for the marquise and Fabien, and now we are expecting the King of France!"

"One of the greatest kings alive!" added Pedro.

Soon a horn was heard and a company of gentlemen dashed over the drawbridge and into the courtyard.

"The king and his suite!" cried Petronilla, adding disappointedly: "There are not more than twenty of them, and Guillot told us that the King of France traveled about with thousands of men to guard him and with the whole court."

"But madame told me," replied Pedro, "the messenger informed her that none but his Majesty and a few of his gentlemen were to be here to-day."

"Now I wonder which is the king. If he only had his crown on his head we could easily tell. I am sure that short gentleman with light hair must be the king. Is he not beautiful? Nobody but a king could look like that, for all kings are beautiful, of course. His face is red and white like lilies and roses."

"A king must look as the good God made him," said Pedro wisely. "Look! That is the king who is now dismounting, for the other gentlemen have removed their hats, while he still wears his own."

"That tall man with the big nose!" ejaculated his sister. "Oh, no, it can not be."

"But it is," insisted Pedro; "do you not see how all are waiting for him and looking at him, and

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one of the gentlemen offers him his arm to lean on, while another fastens the buckle of his shoe? And you know Guillot told us that the king has the largest nose in France."

"Yes, I remember now; and Guillot bragged about it as if it were an honor to have a large nose, just as if everybody could not have one."

"How foolish you are! Of course everybody could not have a large nose."

"Yes, they could."

"Could you change yours?"

"No, of course not," she returned, smoothing that straight little feature with her forefinger.

"Then why do you say that any one else could?"

"I did not mean that any one could go to work and change his own nose. I meant that a peasant could have a big nose as well as a king."

"Then you should say just what you mean when you talk."

It was odd that upon so momentous an occasion as the arrival of a king the Velasco twins should become absorbed in an argument upon a subject so trivial; it can only be excused by the trite explanation that children will be children.

"Lenoir's nose is every bit as big as the king's," went on the little girl. "I wonder why the good God did not make kings and queens so different from other people that one could tell them at once?"

"Why do you not look well at the king, now that

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you have a chance, instead of wondering about matters nobody can explain?" asked her brother.

So Petronilla remained silent and turned all her attention to the king, whom historians have styled "the courtly and magnificent monarch of the Renaissance." He was tall and strong, with bold features, closely-clipped hair and a pointed beard. He wore a hunting-suit of dark green velvet embroidered with silver, a green velvet hat, the brim of which was thickly set with jewels, which sparkled and glowed in the bright sunlight, while a jeweled chain with a large ornament attached hung about his neck. The gentlemen of the king's suite were scarcely less splendidly attired, for it was a period when much attention was paid to dress, and when men gave as much thought to their appearance as the women could possibly do.

Francis the First seemed to be in a very good humor this morning, as though matters were going very well with him. He chatted with the gentlemen who walked on either side of him and as they disappeared through an arched doorway his loud laugh rang out and echoed down the corridors.

Petronilla drew a deep sigh of satisfaction. "Is it not a fine thing to see a king with one's own eyes?" said she.

"I wonder what Jules would say if he knew that we had seen the King of France," said Pedro. "How I wish we could run home and tell them about it, for there is not half the pleasure in see-

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ing wonderful things if you can not tell somebody about them."

"Let us write a letter for our mother to read to them all in the kitchen," suggested Petronilla at once.

"That is a good idea, if we knew any one to send it by, but there is nobody going that way that we are acquainted with."

His sister's countenance fell. "Well, we each can be writing a letter anyway, whenever we feel like it,—and we will tell everything strange that we have seen from the very first,—and then if we find some one who is going that way we can send it home."

Francis did not remain long at the abode of his niece. The princess was summoned to his presence and talked with him for some time, after which a splendid collation was served; and then the king and his gentlemen galloped gaily away, to be joined by his hundreds of horsemen with their hawks and hounds in the forest, whence the faint sound of horns could be heard. All life seemed to disappear from the castle as the last glimpse of waving plumes could be seen on the drawbridge, and the Velasco twins expressed a wish that they could live at court, where everything was lively and where the king and his merry party were always present.

But the ruler of France had left a cyclone behind him in the old palace-castle of Plessis-les-

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Tours,—a storm the effects of which were felt by all who dwelt beneath its ancient roof.

“Oh, my dears,” said the marquise to the twins, “something dreadful has happened! Her Highness, the princess, has seriously offended her royal uncle.”

“But she seemed to love him so much, Madame,” said Petronilla.

“And so she always has, but now he wants her to be married; and the idea is most distasteful to her.”

“To be married! Why, she is not as tall as I am!”

“True, she is nothing but a child, but his Majesty thinks it best for her to marry the Duke of Cleves, who is a fine, handsome man, and for reasons of state the marriage will be most pleasing to the King of France. But when he mentioned his plans to her the princess burst out crying and begged her uncle not to force her to wed Monsieur de Cleves. The king was angry, for, you see, he is not accustomed to having any one say no to what he proposes. He has commanded that we shall set out for Paris at once, where her Highness will be presented to the bridegroom.”

“Are we all going, Madame?” asked Petronilla.

“Yes; the whole household, except some of the servants.”

“We are all human, and, in spite of the fact that

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Jeanne was in great trouble, the twins experienced a wild throb of delight at the prospect of seeing Paris,—a city which they believed to be an earthly paradise.

The marquise went on talking about the effects of the king's visit. "Madame de Silly has told her Highness that if she behaves in this manner she will not produce a very favorable impression upon her future husband; but she says she does not care and insists that she does not see the advantage of leaving her own country to marry the Duke of Cleves."

"But our good queen will not let her daughter be married if it will make her so unhappy," said Pedro.

The marquise shook her head. "The Queen of Navarre loves her royal brother so much that her opinion is always the same as his own; and I believe that she would part with her daughter for ever if she thought that the king would be gratified by the separation. Speaking for myself, I do not see why any one should want to disobey the King of France, for a more affable monarch I would not wish to see. He is far more amiable than the King of Navarre, who is a very small king beside him. Just think of it! he actually told me to-day that he had heard I was possessed of great beauty in my youth, and he added with a perfectly radiant smile that there is a good deal of it left! Won't that be a fine thing for Fabien

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to tell his children and his grandchildren, as coming to his grandmother from Francis the First of France?"

Petronilla thought there certainly was a good deal of the marquise left and she possessed the beauty of good-nature and of a warm heart,—a kind of loveliness which leaves its imprint upon the face and remains as long as life lasts.

Though the time had been when Francis could not have his own way, as, for instance, on the field of Pavia, he could rule as he liked in his own country; and when he commanded that the household at Plessis-les-Tours should be broken up and its inmates leave it for another abode, there was none to say him nay. This time all were glad of the change save the little princess, who insisted she was going to her doom.

"Very few people travel as much as we do," said Petronilla, as they again set out on a journey. "Why, even Aunt Catalina has not traveled so much, though I am sure she would say that to see Queen Isabella was worth more than anybody or anything that we have seen."

The little girl was riding on a pillion behind her brother, and the twins were very happy at being thus close together and able to talk to each other, which they could do when riding a little apart from the others.

"And every time we travel," said Pedro, "we have more and more soldiers to guard us." This

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was true. Their first journey had been taken in a style that had seemed to them to be splendid; their second was more gorgeous still, for it had been ordered by the queen of Navarre; but at present they were traveling by command of the King of France, and as there was in the party a princess of the blood-royal, everything was magnificent, from the gilded litters to the fine damaskened arms of the horsemen, for they were not guarded altogether by common soldiers, but by men of noble birth.

The journey to Paris was broken by stops at the mansions of the nobility along the way, where Princess Jeanne was fêted as if she already were queen, though this did not seem to dispel the gloom that had settled upon her ever since she became acquainted with her uncle's wishes.

Jules and Guillot had said so much about the glories of Paris that the children would not have been surprised to find the city one glittering mass of gold, with its inhabitants clothed in gleaming robes and going in and out of jeweled doors. Naturally they were disappointed at what they really saw, for Paris, though a fine city, does not even to-day resemble the place pictured by the vivid imagination of the twins; and in the sixteenth century it was far less attractive, so far as mere beauty is concerned, than it is at present. There were a great many frame houses with huge roofs which jutted over the streets, resembling so

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many small boys wearing their fathers' hats. But an artist would have called much of it picturesque,—for instance, the caryatids, which are women holding the roof on their shoulders and always make some of us feel that they ought to be allowed to come down and rest a while; and the water-spouts, which were winged serpents and, when it rained, obligingly allowed the water to gush through their open mouths.

Even though it was not the fairy city of their dreams, there were a great many wonderful things to see in Paris. There were monasteries surrounded with flowers, where monks could see something of the beauties of this world while preparing themselves for the next; there were crooked streets where merchants had their shops; and there was the king's palace, where he stayed when he felt so inclined,—which never was very long at a time, for Francis was restless and always moving about.

But the people in the streets were a sight to behold. Nobles in glittering costume prancing on fiery horses; students shouting and laughing as if life were given to them for no other purpose than to be happy in; grave monks in long black or white gowns, with cowl-covered heads, stealing in and out among the noisy crowd like ghosts; men who fasted and flogged themselves and were as anxious to be miserable as the students were to be happy,—yes, it was a strange place, this wonderful Paris, and often bewildering.

CHAPTER XX

A REBELLIOUS LITTLE PRINCESS

Pedro and his sister were not present when, by order of the king, the Duke of Cleves was presented to the Princess Jeanne of Navarre, but they saw him in the anteroom as he was coming out.

"The duke is very old for her Highness, is he not, Madame?" asked Petronilla of the marquise, who was always ready to indulge in a little innocent gossip.

"He is twenty-four," replied she; "that is just twice as old as the princess. You would not care to be twice as old as the lady you marry, would you, my boy?" she asked of Pedro.

"No, Madame, but Monsieur de Cleves will never again be twice as old as her Highness."

"That is true," replied the old lady, who was not very brilliant at figures and had not thought of this before. "He can only keep twelve years ahead of her, when all is said and done; so when she is thirty he will be but forty-two, which is not so great a difference, after all. His Majesty was very angry with the princess to-day, because her bearing toward Monsieur de Cleves was so cold and haughty," went on the marquise. "She acted

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as if he were not good enough even to touch the ground she treads on, whereas his family is a very good one. King Henry of England did not disdain Anne of Cleves, the sister of monsieur, for his consort."

"Is not Monsieur de Cleves afraid that the King of England will kill his sister, the queen, Madame?" asked Petronilla.

"Of course not, my child; why should he fear anything of that kind?"

"I have heard about Queen Anne Boleyn, Madame, and I thought perhaps he liked to kill his wives."

"He does not seem to be very lucky with them, that is certain, for this one is his fourth; but let us hope, my dear, that Anne of Cleves will be his last!"—a hope that was not realized, for we know that Henry the Eighth had two more wives after this, one of whom he beheaded.

The Princess Jeanne continued to be so obstinate regarding her marriage that there was a constant flutter of excitement among her attendants. It is not a simple matter to defy the king of one country and the queen of another, even though the queen be one's own mother.

Marguerite of Navarre wrote a long letter to Francis, in which she expressed herself as being unable to understand her daughter's conduct. She stated that the King of Navarre was both astonished and grieved and that she hoped the King of

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France would forgive his niece for her obstinacy. A bishop brought this letter to Francis and returned with one to the queen, in which the king commanded that his sister should take Jeanne to Châtellerault, in order that the wedding might take place at once.

One day Petronilla was alone with the princess. The latter was playing with Vif and trying to enjoy herself as a child should without being troubled by thoughts of the future, when suddenly the door opened and a tall and elegantly-dressed lady entered the room.

It was the Queen of Navarre, but her costume was so rich and so different from the plain attire in which she usually dressed in her own realm that Petronilla scarcely knew her.

“My mother!” cried Jeanne in ecstasy.

“My darling, my little one!” said the queen, clasping her daughter in her arms and kissing her a dozen times. “See, I have not sent for you to come to me. I have come to you to ask you, to implore you, to yield to his Majesty’s wishes. It is for your own happiness, could you but realize it.”

It was strange to see how Jeanne froze at once at the mention of her marriage. “It will be of no advantage to me to leave France, to leave my own country of Navarre to marry a German duke,” she said. “And if you compel me to marry Monsieur de Cleves I shall die.”

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They seemed to forget Petronilla's presence. Afraid to stay, yet afraid to leave the room without permission, she stood half-concealed behind a high-backed chair where, surprised and awed, she listened trembling to the war of words between this mother and daughter.

Never would Petronilla have dared to address her mother in this manner, for Jeanne defied the queen to the last. Never, never, she declared, would she be married to the Duke of Cleves! Her mother wept and pleaded in vain.

Finally Marguerite rose and said with flashing eyes, "There is but one measure to be tried, since reasoning and pleading are of no avail. You shall be treated as the peasant deals with his unruly child; you shall be severely whipped!"

This threat was so terrible and so unexpected that Petronilla, whose heart was a very tender one and who pitied her little mistress deeply, sobbed aloud.

Marguerite had started toward the door, but, hearing the sob, she turned and perceived the little Béarnaise trembling with fright.

The queen's brow knit into a frown for a moment, then with the tips of her jeweled fingers she smoothed a curl from Petronilla's forehead.

"I had forgotten you, my little maid," she said. "You have heard a heartbroken mother defied by her daughter. It is small wonder that the scene should have frightened you, my poor child."

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Then, as if overcome by her own emotions, the queen abruptly left the room.

It seemed to Petronilla that Jeanne surely must yield after hearing her mother's threat, for in all ages and in all climes a threatened whipping ever has been a forceful argument. But the next day Jeanne showed her the following letter, composed by herself and written by her own hand. This document, which was witnessed by three members of her household and with which every one is familiar who has read her biography, was as follows:

I, Jehanne de Navarre, persisting in the protestations I have already made, do hereby again affirm and protest, by these present, that the marriage which it is desired to contract between the Duke of Cleves and myself is against my will; that I have never consented to it nor will consent; and that all I may say and do hereafter, by which it may be attempted to prove that I have given my consent, will be forcibly extorted against my wish and desire from my dread of the king, of the king, my father, and of the queen, my mother, who has threatened to have me whipped by the Baillive de Caen, my governess. By the command of the queen, my mother, my said governess has also several times declared that if I do not all in regard to this marriage which the king wishes, and if I did not give my consent, I should be punished so severely as to occasion my death; and that by refusing I should be the cause of the ruin and total destruction of my father, my mother and their house; the which has inspired me with such fear and dread even to be the cause of the ruin of my said father and mother, that I know not where to have recourse, excepting to God, seeing that my father and my mother abandon me, who both well know what I have said to them,—that never can I love the Duke of Cleves and I will not have him. Therefore I protest beforehand if it

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happens that I am affianced or married to the said Duke of Cleves in any way or manner it will be against my heart and in defiance of my will ; and that he shall never become my husband nor will I hold and regard him as such, and that any marriage shall be reputed null and void ; in testimony of which I appeal to God and yourselves as witnesses of this my declaration that you are about to sign with me, admonishing each of you to remember the compulsion, violence and constraint employed against me upon the matter of this said marriage.

Signed,

Jehanne de Navarre,

J. d'Arros,

Francis Navarro,

Arnauld Duquesse.

To Petronilla this seemed to be the most wonderful letter ever written. She was sure that none but a princess of the blood-royal could have done as well. With a clean piece of parchment and a pen made from the best of quills she practised writing a protest for herself. She played that the King of France had commanded her to wed one of his own sons—which was somewhat ambitious on her part, even as a make-believe ; but she found that not only did she fail to word it in dignified language, but she could only think of a few lines to write. So she made up her mind that one must really be in great trouble before one can write a long letter about it.

In accordance with the command of Francis, the betrothal was celebrated at once at Alençon with much pomp and ceremony in the great hall of the château. But the little princess was determined to

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impress it upon the minds of all that this was directly opposed to her will and she wrote another protest:

I, Jehanne de Navarre, in the presence of you who out of love for the truth signed the protestation which I before presented and who perceive that I am compelled and obliged by the queen, my mother, and by my governess to submit to the marriage demanded by the Duke of Cleves between himself and me, and that it is intended against my will to proceed to the solemnity of marriage between us, I take you all to witness that I persevere in the protest I made before you on the day of the pretended betrothal between myself and the said Duke of Cleves and in all and every protestation that I may at any time have made by word of mouth or under my hand; moreover, I declare that the said solemnity of marriage and every other thing ordained relative to it is done against my will and that all shall hereafter be regarded as null and void, as having been done and consented to by me under violence and restraint; in testimony of which I call you all to witness, requesting you to sign the present with myself in the hope that by God's help it will one day avail me.

Jehanne de Navarre,
J. d'Arros,
Francis Navarro,
Arnauld Duquesse.

Neither of these documents did the least bit of good, but sometimes when we are very angry or very unhappy, it is a comfort to write our woes down in black and white, even if we destroy the written complaint the next moment. So it is reasonable to suppose that these two declarations, made in the solemn form, and signed by witnesses, were a relief to Jeanne's feelings, even though they

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failed of accomplishing the end intended; but to the student of history they furnish another proof of the remarkable firmness of character she displayed later in life.

It was at Alençon that the twins first beheld the King of Navarre. He had arrived before the coming of Queen Marguerite, the princess and their suites, and he met them in a garden laid out in squares like a checker-board. In the Arsenal Library at Paris there is a picture of him as he met the queen. It was painted by the order of Marguerite herself, and shows him to be a handsome man with light hair; he is holding in his hand a stiff flower resembling a dahlia, presumably intended for Queen Marguerite.

“Her Highness is so quiet and so cold!” remarked Petronilla to her brother after their arrival at Châtellerault, where the marriage was to be celebrated. “When the queen, her mother, kisses her she merely turns her cheek without giving a kiss in return, though she is more affectionate to the king, her father. Sometimes we have been provoked with our mother when she punished us, but we never held out so long, did we, brother?”

“No, and we were never angry for more than a day with Aunt Catalina, though she sometimes was very unkind to us,” replied Pedro. “I do not see why Monsieur de Cleves wants to marry our princess, since she hates him so much.”

“Madame la Marquise says he does not care

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anything about her Highness one way or the other," returned his sister; "so it makes very little difference to him what she says or does. It does not seem to be a family that anybody wants to marry into, for madame told me that the King of England was very sorry he had married the sister of Monsieur de Cleves, and would like a good excuse to break it off."

"Yes, Guillot told me about it; but he says it was because King Henry wanted a beautiful wife and was disappointed in her after having seen her portrait, which flattered her."

"Then he was in the wrong, for you know Brother François always told us we should not praise or condemn any one because of personal appearance, since we do not make ourselves and we are not to blame if we are plain and we deserve no credit if we are beautiful."

This remark was delivered with an air of great wisdom, and there is no doubt that if "Burly King Hal" could have heard Petronilla's opinion of him, and, hearing, had heeded it, the pages of his biography would not have been so exciting as they are at present.

CHAPTER XXI

A CAPTIOUS BRIDE, A GORGEOUS WEDDING, AND A HUNT WITH HAWK AND HOUNDS

Even to be in an ordinary house when a wedding is about to take place is a most delightful experience; to be in a palace on the eve of the marriage of a princess, when among the guests are to be a great king with his queen and his brilliant court, is almost as wonderful and beautiful as a trip to fairy-land. Besides this, the bride was a child who was about to be led to the altar, not because she was willing to be married, but because she was afraid of a whipping!—well, the Velasco twins were in the midst of strange events!

The Princess Jeanne had not ceased to implore her uncle to break off the match, but Francis only laughed and told her that little girls did not know what was best for them.

The duke tried to gain a friendly glance or a smile from his bride-to-be, but she snubbed him so severely that he contented himself with the society of her mother, whom he greatly admired. No doubt he devoutly wished that she had taught her daughter to be as agreeable as she was herself.

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The sky was fair on the wedding-day, and the sun itself seemed no brighter than the jewels that sparkled everywhere. All through the palace could be heard the buzz and bustle of preparation, but the most stirring incidents were occurring in the apartment of the bride.

In spite of the great ladies who surrounded her, Jeanne insisted that Petronilla should keep close to her side, and the little girl watched the progress of the gorgeous toilet so often described in history. It is safe to say that never was a magnificent gown slipped over the head of a more captious and irritable bride. Jeanne found fault with each and every article as it was brought forth; and had she been of a less exalted station she doubtless would have been soundly shaken for her peevishness. Her bridal robe was so resplendent that Petronilla wondered how any girl, even a princess, could fail to be delighted with it. This robe was of cloth of gold so thickly set with gems that it gave Jeanne the appearance of a jewel, scintillating flashes from a thousand facets.

"Why are you so unhappy, Madame?" whispered Petronilla to the princess, in order to comfort her. "You are going to stay with her Majesty for years before his Grace, the duke, will come to take you away, and—and—you have such beautiful things!"

"I do not wish to be married," snapped the princess so suddenly and so fiercely that Petro-

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nilla felt as if she had been unexpectedly drenched with cold water.

A ducal coronet, which was a mass of priceless jewels, was the last touch to be added to her toilet. As it was placed on her soft hair Jeanne gave a cry of pain and declared that it pressed her brow and made her head ache,—which was doubtless true, though she would have found fault with it in any event.

History tells us there was as much display at the wedding of this little girl as there would have been for the coronation of a great king. Surrounded by all the ladies of the court and in the presence of the officers of state, the princess was led to the chapel, where she was to be allowed to sit until she should be met by her royal uncle.

Francis himself, in robes of state all a-glitter with gems, then came to lead his niece to the altar. One would have supposed that the little lady might have been awed by being the observed of all observers in this splendid company, but Jeanne was thinking of her own affairs and did not for a moment forget to be obstinate.

When the king extended his hand she partly rose from her chair and then sank down again. "I am ill," she said, "and I can not carry all these jewels!"

Francis was annoyed almost beyond endurance. He had a violent temper, and when angry was in the habit of storming and throwing the furniture

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about. That is probably what he would have done in the present instance had the occasion been less solemn. But with courtiers around him who tremble at his frown, it is very easy for a king to vent his spite, even if he can not express his feelings by smashing things.

Francis had a grudge against the Constable de Montmorency, and now was the time for revenge.

“Take up the princess in your arms and carry her!” commanded the king.

The constable was very high-tempered and very haughty, but he was obliged to obey; and so the first man of the kingdom was forced to play the part of nurse-maid! It is difficult to imagine his feelings as he stooped to lift Jeanne in his arms, for he probably knew that there were others in that assembly besides the king who would secretly exult at his discomfiture.

Petronilla expected to see the princess struggle and try to slip to the floor, but she seemed at last to realize the fact that it was useless to offer further opposition and remained perfectly quiet, a sparkling bundle in the arms of the humiliated Montmorency.

The marriage was performed by a great dignitary of the Church, assisted by others almost as great, and then followed a magnificent banquet, and later a ball.

Jeanne declared, now she was married according to the wishes of the King of France,



The Princess remained perfectly quiet, a sparkling bundle in the arms
of the humiliated Montmorency

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there was really no necessity for her to appear at the ball. His Majesty thought otherwise, however, and commanded her to come to the ball. The princess obeyed, and among her attendants were the Velasco twins, gorgeously attired and possibly the happiest in that company, for it was the very first ball they ever had witnessed.

The festivities did not cease with the ball, but continued for more than a week; and to pay for it all, the duty was raised on salt, and the people contributed when they seasoned their food. For that reason Jeanne's wedding was called *les noces sallées*, or salted wedding.

On the day after the wedding his Majesty ordered a hunt, for he never was happier than when engaged in the chase. Probably a more dazzling hunting party never was gathered together than was seen on that sunny morning at the palace of Châtellerault.

Francis was mounted on a fiery steed of Andalusia. The horse himself, of noble race, covered with a silken net, with plumes waving above his ears, seemed to realize the richness with which he was caparisoned and that his rider was the king of France, for he arched his neck proudly and caracoled in his impatience to obey the sound of the horns. Although there was a troop of falconers with the guards and huntsmen, the king bore on his embroidered hunting-glove his own hooded hawk, which was expected to do its duty when the

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proper time arrived, as became all faithful subjects of the sovereign.

At the king's right hand rode Queen Eleanor. This royal lady was the sister of Charles the Fifth of Spain, and before her marriage with Francis she had been the widow of the King of Portugal. From him she had received so many jewels that their size and value astonished even the French courtiers, who, one would suppose, were accustomed to see all that was gorgeous in that line. We are told that she often wore a pair of diamond earrings the size of walnuts,—a statement difficult to believe, for a queen is only mortal, after all, and her ears are not specially prepared to bear weights so heavy. If they must be compared to a nut let us call them the size of a filbert, and even if that were the real size of the jewels it is safe to say the queen was not always happy when she was wearing them. Queen Eleanor was still a pretty woman, though no longer in the first bloom of youth, and this morning she was handsomer than usual with the feathered brim of her hat—trimmed in imitation of the king's—shading her dark hair and her cheeks glowing with the caresses of the balmy air.

On the other side of Francis rode Catherine de' Medici, who was the wife of his son and heir, the Dauphin Henri. The young readers of this story later will learn from their histories of the wicked deeds planned and executed by this woman when

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she became Queen of France. But at this time she was but a girl in years, and had done nothing really wrong, though one can not tell if there were not even then various dark schemes for the future revolving themselves in her mind. She did everything in her power to flatter her royal father-in-law and always went with him to the chase, some have said to be near him and watch him.

Catherine, who in her childhood was called *la duchessina*, the little duchess, was an Italian, and though she had in her veins the blood of two popes, there were also merchants in her family. As the Velasco twins were sometimes reminded of their goldsmith's blood, Catherine never was allowed to forget that she was the descendant of men who were not of noble birth, but who had enriched themselves by buying and selling. Perhaps "two kinds of blood" made her the more intelligent, as it sharpened the wits of Pedro and Petronilla, for she brought about a number of changes in the manners and customs of the French. It was she who introduced the side-saddle as we have it to-day; before that time ladies' saddles were made in such a manner that the rider was obliged to sit with her face toward the side of the horse, with her feet on a little board, which was anything but comfortable, as our girl readers will find should they ever take a ride in the environs of Tangier, a city where most things are centuries behind the time.

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We are told that Catherine's appetite was "enormous," which accounts for the many delicacies she suggested to the palace cooks, as we already have seen.

Catherine de' Medici was not pretty; she was not even pleasing, with her flat face and her large eyes showing too much of their whites, like the eyes of a fractious horse; but she could be most agreeable when it suited her, and at this period of her existence it was her aim to please the king and everybody of whom he was fond.

The dauphin, Catherine's husband, was the handsomest of Francis' sons, but he was not a favorite with his father, because he saw in him a reminder that he must one day give place to another.

The King and Queen of Navarre also were of this noble company, and the Duke and Duchess of Cleves, the sulky little bride scarcely vouchsafing her husband a word. And in her train rode Pedro, Petronilla and Fabien, the three children looking at the splendor about them and eagerly awaiting the sport without perceiving the evidences of envy and ill-feeling which were always to be seen at court.

"The falconer allowed me to hold the king's hawk on my own hand this morning," said Fabien exultingly. "Its hood is embroidered in gold and pearls and the bells on its legs are of gold with the king's name on them. Every strap that holds one of his hawks has a gold ring on it and on each one

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is engraved, 'I belong to the king.' And just think of it, he has sixty hounds! I wish I had been a king instead of a marquis."

"How glad I am that our princess decided to hunt to-day!" remarked Pedro; "otherwise we should have been obliged to remain in the palace with her Highness."

"She did not want to come," said his sister, "although she is fond of the chase. But her Majesty, the Queen of Navarre, told her that she must do so, else the king, her uncle, would be very angry."

"Just think of anybody's refusing to hunt!" exclaimed Fabien. "Why, I was so afraid that something would happen to prevent our coming that I was almost ill, and I called to Guillot to go to the window at least a dozen times during the night to see what he thought of the weather."

"I thought the Count de Saint-Victor lived at the court of France," said Petronilla, "but I have not seen him since we have been here."

"The king has sent him away, to Spain, I think, though I am not sure," said Fabien. "He will be gone for some time, and my grandmother says that when he returns he will bring a bride with him. She would not tell me the bride's name, for she said it was to be a surprise to the three of us. I had promised you, Nilla, that I would not tell what we know, or I would have told her that it will surprise us not at all! Your good times will be ended when your aunt comes, you can make up

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your mind to that. If she had been here to-day she would not have permitted you to hunt, just because she would know it would almost break your hearts not to come."

"You talk very foolishly, Fabien," said Pedro. "You know very well that we should be obliged to obey her Highness in any case, and even our aunt, when she comes, must sometimes do as she is told, whether she likes it or not."

It was very difficult for Petronilla to imagine Aunt Catalina at the court of France. Would her aunt wear gorgeous gowns such as the other ladies wore? Would she have a hat with a feathered brim, such as they wore in imitation of the queen who imitated the king? The little girl felt that such a costume would not be at all suitable to Aunt Catalina. The marquise had told her that some of the ladies wore wigs, and that one of them kept a footman with light hair on purpose to clip his locks occasionally in order to furbish up her wig; it might be that her aunt would wear false hair which would look better than her own under the feathered hat. "It will be very strange to see our aunt among the court ladies," she said aloud, "but we will tell her all that we have learned and will try to help her all we can, for it is sometimes very difficult to know how to act at court."

This remark was not heard by her companions, for the dogs were running about and giving vent to shrill yelps, while the varlets were calling the

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dogs and the huntsmen were calling the varlets, making altogether such a hubbub that nobody could hear what was said by anybody else.

The wings of the hawk on the king's wrist quivered with excitement. Her quarry was near; soon would she be allowed her freedom, when out into the glad air she would dart and make the prey her own.

Then from the thicket flew a heron in an agony of fear and shot skyward. Quickly and deftly, and at the proper moment—for he was called the king of sportsmen—Francis unhooded his hawk, which with a piercing cry mounted the air in the wake of its victim. Up and up soared the heron as if to hide himself in the mists of the clouds from his pitiless enemy, which with sweeping wings followed close behind him.

“Oh, I hope he will escape!” thought Petronilla, whose tender little heart ached for this creature, trying so hard to save itself from death. But it is to be feared that Pedro, as well as Fabien, would have been very much disappointed at such a result, so greatly does the instinct of the sportsman dominate all promptings of mercy.

Mounting higher and still higher the heron was every moment growing smaller; his enemy, too, was rapidly diminishing in size and only the faintest possible tinkle of her golden bells could be heard. Soon the two birds were no more than mere specks in the sky, but it could be seen that

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the pursuer was gaining rapidly and the spectators breathlessly awaited the result. Then suddenly and swiftly, and like an arrow from the bow, the hawk shot above her prey, hovered there for an imperceptible space of time, as if in exultation, then swooped upon it—and the heron was vanquished.

It was splendid sport, they all said; the varlets, the huntsmen and even the courtiers shouted, and the king, when his bird was returned to him, stroked her feathers fondly, well pleased with her aërial victory. But Petronilla shuddered and thought only of the poor heron which had made so brave a struggle for its life.

It is probable that, as the day advanced, and bird after bird was slain by its pursuer, none enjoyed the pastime more than Catherine de' Medici, who, in after years, was to stand in the window of her palace to listen for the cries of the human victims slain at her instigation, and as innocent of real wrong as the frightened herons brought to earth by the king's hawks.

At the banquet that evening the children had places at the table with the other attendants of the princess. At the upper end of the room was the table prepared for royalty, who sat only on one side of it, to leave the view free for what was going on in the room; for there often were various amusements prepared for the king to enjoy while at table.

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Behind Francis stood his grand cup-bearer, a very pompous-appearing individual, who held the ewer and the silver basin filled with perfumed water for the king's hands, and poured his wine from an odd kind of pitcher like a two-handled vase. On the floor at the corner of the festive board was Brusquet, the king's fool, whose business it was to make his Majesty laugh. He was never told to be silent, could talk all the time, if he liked, and say what he chose about anybody.

A band of minstrels played during the meal, making what was considered very tuneful music, though it is doubtful if we should appreciate it to-day. When the music ceased a company of maskers came in; these performers wore birds' heads and danced about, probably in imitation of a play given by the Greeks nearly two thousand years earlier.

Francis laughed very heartily at these antics, and so did every one else, but they would have done so whether they had been amused or not, since at court every one must laugh or cry with the king.

CHAPTER XXII

HIS MAJESTY'S GOLDEN PHEASANT

In the grounds of Châtellerault, galleries and triumphal arches were constructed and here jousts and tourneys were held. Tents were made of green boughs with the arms of the knights outside, and in little booths were men clad as hermits, whose duty it was to serve as guides. The gentlemen were dressed as knights of old and the ladies, who also had their own booths and grottos, were in the costumes of nymphs and dryads. Old chroniclers tell us that it was one of the most magnificent sights that had ever been seen when the knights came forth and fought in their glittering armor, and the ladies from their verdant galleries clapped their jeweled hands in applause.

At the close of the day, when the lords and the ladies, fatigued with sport, followed the example of the king and sought their apartments for rest, Pedro, Petronilla and Fabien lingered together under the trees to talk over the wonders of the day, for you may be sure there was a great deal for them to discuss at this time. As they were commanding the dexterity of this or that knight, they saw approaching them a scullion who, after many

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bows and much embarrassment—for he was not accustomed to addressing people who were clad in silks and satins—indicated that he had something to say to them.

“I wonder what this booby really wants,” said Fabien as coolly as if the boy had been a dog who could not understand him.

“I gave myself the liberty of crossing the courtyard”—stammered the scullion, then stopped, too confused to continue.

“You need not come to us to make excuses about it, my good fellow,” said Fabien, “we do not own this palace and it does not concern us if you cross the courtyard every minute from now until you die of old age.”

“Is it forbidden to the servants to enter the courtyard?” asked Pedro. “I do not see how they could come in and out any other way.”

“Perhaps they are expected to let themselves down from an outside window,” giggled Fabien.

“It is not forbidden, gracious master, oh, no, it is not forbidden in the least,” murmured the scullion, wriggling about uneasily and seeming at a loss what to do with his hands.

“Then why do you come to us about it?” asked Pedro.

The scullion looked up at the sky, then down at the ground, then on both sides of him, and blurted out: “I met him in the courtyard and he wants to see you.”

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"Somebody to see us?" asked Pedro. "Then why did you not say so? Send him along."

The fellow scampered off, glad to get away from these aristocratic folk who, he feared, were laughing at him.

The winds of the evening were now beginning to sigh through the tops of the trees, and with a shiver Fabien asked: "What if it should be the man with the scar come to carry me off?"

"He would not dare to come through the palace gates after us," said Pedro; "besides, we are near enough to the sentry to call him. Do you not see him through the trees, pacing back and forth?"

"I can not imagine who would want to see you," remarked Fabien. "Of course," he went on pompously, "there are a good many who always are wanting to see me."

Soon they saw coming through the trees a tall figure in the garb of the Franciscan Brotherhood, and even before he threw back his cowl they recognized Brother François.

Pedro and Petronilla plunged toward the good friar, ready to smother him with caresses, for never until this moment had they realized how fond they were of Brother François, who now was like a glimpse of home.

The friar himself actually kissed each of them on the forehead, which was perhaps the first kiss he had ever given to any one and showed his deep affection for his former pupils.

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"And now tell us all about home, and first about our mother," said Pedro.

"The señora is in the best of health. Sometimes she is thoughtful and tells how she misses you, but I have found her at times singing over her needle-work as blithe as a bird."

"She can sing and be happy without us?" asked Petronilla in wonder.

"And why not?" asked the friar. "Would you have her shed tears for you from morning until night?" Then he added: "And that excellent lady, your aunt, also is in the best of health and is very cheerful."

"We can understand why she is cheerful," snarled Fabien.

"Why?" asked Brother François.

Petronilla gave the boy a sly pinch and, remembering his promise, he finished lamely, "Because she is so pious."

"Very true," returned the friar, satisfied with the reply; "and may you never forget the real source of cheerfulness."

"Did you come all the way to this palace on purpose to see us, Brother François?" asked Petronilla.

"No, indeed! It was only by the merest accident I learned that you were at the court of France." Then he told them that he had been to Paris on business for his Order, and that he must soon leave them, as he was obliged to look for a friend

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with whom he would pass the night. In the morning early he must resume his journey homeward.

It was fortunate that the twins had each a long letter written and ready to send to their mother, describing all the important events of their new life. These letters they intrusted to Brother François, who promised them that as soon as their mother had read them he would himself take them to the kitchen and read them to Jules, Tomas, Olympie and all the rest.

"I wish, Brother François," said Petronilla wistfully, "that we could give you some refreshments before you go, but I do not see how we could manage it."

The good friar begged her not to give herself any uneasiness on his account, but incidentally remarked that he had fasted since early morning.

"It would be a shame to have you go away from us hungry," said Pedro, taking from his purse a gold piece that had been given to him some time before by the Count de Saint-Victor. "Fabien, can we not buy some food for Brother François?"

"Give me the money," said Fabien, "and I will buy something for him. Go into this grotto, all of you, where you will not be seen, and I will have refreshments brought at once."

Fabien was so long away that Pedro said uneasily: "I am afraid he is playing us a trick. It would be like him not to come back at all and to return the money to me to-morrow morning."

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"He could not be so cruel," said Petronilla, while the countenance of Brother François fell, for it is an uncomfortable thing to expect a good meal and then to stand face to face with the possibility of a disappointment.

After a very long time, during which the twins grew more and more uneasy and the friar more and more hungry, Fabien appeared, accompanied by a servant who bore on a tray the long-expected refreshments.

In the center of the grotto was a table made from the trunk of a tree, and before it was a rustic seat.

After the servant had arranged the viands and had departed, Fabien told Brother François to sit down and help himself.

Their visitor needed no second bidding. There was a starling pie, a roast bird and a flagon of wine; and the odor of the smoking food was most appetizing.

By this time it was dark and the only light was that of the moon, whose rays shone through an opening in the foliage full upon the table, but even without pale Luna's light the monk would have done ample justice to the meal, which he enjoyed to the fullest extent. The roast bird was particularly fine, being moistened with orange juice, powdered with sugar and flavored with spices; and he felt that, though he should do penance by a week of fasting for his pleasure in this de-

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licious repast, it would assuredly be well worth his while.

"We thought you were not coming back again, Fabien," said Petronilla, while their guest was thus pleasantly engaged.

"I do not see why you should have thought so," said the little marquis haughtily. "I told you I was going to find refreshments and I have brought them. Do I ever break my word?"

"Yes, you do sometimes."

The boy blustered for a while, and then, as the accusation was one he could not deny, he cooled down and said: "I had to wait a long while for that bird to cook. It had just been put on the spit when I went to the kitchen."

"Did you go to the kitchen?" asked Petronilla in surprise.

"Of course. Where else would you go to find food? To the picture gallery?"

"What kind of a bird is it, Fabien?" asked Pedro.

"Never you mind what kind of a bird it is. It is pretty good, is it not, Brother François?"

"It is delightful," replied the friar, who, helping himself generously, did not seem at all curious regarding the richly-seasoned fowl placed before him. When his meal was finished he took his leave with many expressions of thanks to his young friends, who had been so thoughtful for his comfort and had given him so royal a supper.

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"I do not know what he would have said had he known what I do about that bird," said Fabien with a titter, when the friar had left them.

"What was there wrong about it? Oh, Fabien, was it poisoned?" asked Petronilla in horror.

At this question the boy, and not without reason, fairly boiled with indignation. "Of what else are you going to accuse me? Why should I want to give Brother François poisoned food? Am I a murderer?"

"Oh, pardon me, Fabien," cried Petronilla. "Of course I know you would not do such a thing, but I heard Madame say that poison often finds its way to a king's kitchen. But tell me, was there anything wrong with the bird? You would not tell us what kind of a fowl it was."

"That was because I thought he would be afraid to eat it. When I went to the kitchen they were just putting on the spit a fine golden pheasant, which is the king's own bird. When I start out to get a thing I believe in always getting the best, so I offered the cook the gold piece for it. He said he did not dare to let me have it, for it was for the king's own supper and was the only one at present in the larder, as there had been an accident of some kind with the others.

"Does his Majesty expect a golden pheasant for supper to-night?" I asked. The cook said no, that his Majesty knew nothing about it, nor did any one else, for that matter. 'Then give it to me,' I

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said, 'and roast another bird for the king.' He held out for a good while, but I held the gold piece so that the light would shine on it and the temptation was too great; so he let me have the golden pheasant and added the starling pie and the wine. I thought I should die of laughing when Brother François called it a 'royal supper', for that is what it was in reality."

"A very clever little conspiracy!" said a deep voice; and at the same time a tall form darkened the doorway of the grotto.

The three children shrank together terrified, while the speaker leaned against one of the trees that formed the natural portal. His face they could not see, but a shaft of moonlight struck a chain about his neck and brought flashes of fire from the jewels on his hands. It was evidently one of the gentlemen of the court, who had overheard their conversation and who would tell the king of the robbery of his supper. The three children were very uncomfortable and wished themselves anywhere else than in that grotto at that particular moment. Fabien, who was always ready to plan mischief, was ever prone to shirk the consequences of his own misdoings and now his teeth were chattering with fear.

"I heard only the last sentence distinctly," said the gentleman, "but before that I thought I heard something about poison in the king's kitchen. Was I right?"

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It was necessary for some one to answer this question, and Pedro came forward and stood in the full light of the moon. "That was but a foolish remark of my sister's, Monsieur," he said respectfully, and he was glad to know that his voice was steady; for, truth to tell, he was trembling inwardly.

"Suppose you tell me the whole story, eh?" said the unknown, whose head towered into the shadows an indistinct white blur, but whose slender beringed hand toyed with the ornament hanging to his neck-chain. "Begin at the beginning and tell me all the story," he repeated, his voice pleasant and kindly.

"It was this way, Monsieur," said Pedro. "Our friend, Brother François, came to see us from our home in Béarn. Always when he came to our own home we offered him refreshment and my sister said she was sorry we could not do so now, especially since he had eaten nothing since morning and we knew that he ever had a good appetite. I had a gold piece with which I said I should like to buy a bite for him, and my friend took the money and went to the kitchen, where he bought a bird, a starling pie and some wine. He did not know what kind of bird it was, poor Brother François! and he enjoyed it very much. But it turned out to be the golden pheasant prepared for the supper of the king."

"It turned out to be!" repeated the gentleman.

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"Did not your friend know beforehand when he bought it that it was the king's bird?"

This question made Pedro very uncomfortable. When caught in mischief he was always ready to tell the truth and suffer the consequences, but he found it extremely unpleasant to play the rôle of telltale. How he wished that he were a grown man, in which case, he thought, he could fight out this business with his sword.

"Come, answer me," said the gentleman in the quick, impatient tone of one who is not accustomed to wait for replies.

"I am afraid he did know it, Monsieur," said the boy; "but if some one is to be punished for the offense I should be that one and not he, for it was my money that bought the bird and my visitor who was benefited by it."

"You say that this friar did not know what he was eating?"

"He? Oh, no, Monsieur, he had not the least idea of it. He thought he was taking a supper honestly obtained and paid for by me."

"Then we will say no more about it upon two conditions. One is that you inform the cook that in the future he is not to sell the food intended for the king's table; the other condition is that you tell your friend, the friar, that he was regaled by the king's supper, that he may rejoice in the memory of having been the guest of the King of France." So saying, he slipped a coin into the

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boy's palm, strode away and was soon lost in the shadows.

"Oh, but I was scared!" exclaimed Fabien, who did not seem to be ashamed of his fright. "That was good of you, Pedro, not to tell my name, and I knew he could not see me in this dark corner."

"This is a gold piece," said Pedro, examining it by the moonlight. "It is to repay what we gave for the pheasant."

"Do you suppose he will tell the king?" asked Petronilla anxiously.

"The king already knows it," replied her brother.

"How should he know it so soon?"

"It was the king himself. When he said, 'Begin at the beginning,' I recognized him by his voice, though I have not often heard him speak."

"I knew him even before he spoke," said Fabien; "and that is why I was so frightened."

"How could you tell that it was he, when you could not see his face?"

"From the perfume that he always has about him. The king always uses musk,"—which proves that Fabien's sense of smell was unerring, as we are told that Francis was fond of that now unpopular perfume and that he was always scented with it.

"If I were a great king," said Petronilla, "I should not stop to inquire about so small a thing as a bird."

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"It was not the bird he cared about. He would not have troubled himself about us if he had not heard you use the word poison."

"And, brother, you did not say 'your Majesty' or kneel," cried Petronilla, trembling as she suddenly remembered this terrible breach of etiquette; "you only said, 'Monsieur,' and you did not kneel!"

"I could see that he did not wish to be recognized, as he took care to keep his face in the shadow, and so I let him think that I did not know I was talking to the king,"—which action on Pedro's part showed that he one day would be an accomplished courtier.

That same night Pedro sent a messenger to Brother François with a note stating that the good friar had eaten the king's pheasant and had been his Majesty's guest,—a fact which Brother François remembered to the end of his days, though he offered up many prayers petitioning for pardon for thinking too much of the pleasures of the table.

Petronilla was the only one of the trio who suffered from the consequences of the friar's visit. They had been so long detained in the grotto, waiting for the supper and afterward by the king, that when she returned to the apartments of Jeanne, Duchess of Cleves, that captious little lady gave her a good scolding for being so long away; and it was only by relating the incident which had

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detained her that Petronilla appeased her Highness, who was amused at their fright.

“That was like my uncle, the King of France,” she remarked; “he is not ungracious, though he has been a tyrant to me.”

CHAPTER XXIII

QUEEN ELEANOR AND THE POMANDER-BOX

In searching through her boxes on the following day Petronilla was reminded that the king was not the only individual at court who could appropriate a special perfume. That which was made for and used only by the Velasco family was, she thought, far superior to the somewhat sickening odor which had met with the favor of his Majesty.

So she took from its casket the pomander-box which her mother had given into her possession the day before the children had left the castle. Since she had left home her life had been so strange and varied that she had forgotten this valuable keepsake, which she now swung from her waist by its chain with all the delight of a child with a new toy. She skipped through the long and now vacant salon, swinging the golden ball which emitted a sweet but pungent fragrance that permeated the entire room.

Queen Eleanor and two of her ladies were passing through the salon on their way from the chase. No sooner had she crossed the threshold than her Majesty stopped suddenly. "That perfume!" she said. "How sweet! Whence does it come?"

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"I think, your Majesty," said one of the ladies, "that it is the pomander-box of that little maiden at the other end of the room, who belongs to the suite of her Highness, the young Duchess of Cleves."

"Bid her come to me," said the queen.

And Petronilla, being informed of the queen's wishes, approached with a sedate step, in striking contrast to the hop and skip in which she had indulged a short time before, when she had forgotten, for the moment, that she was in a palace and not in the old castle at home.

To be addressed by a queen was not now so much of a novelty as it had been, but the little girl stood more in awe of the grave and stately Eleanor than she had of the gracious Marguerite of Navarre.

The queen had taken a seat in the embrasure of an oriel window and the skirt of her blue velvet habit fell about her in soft, rich folds. She looked every inch a queen, but there was a sad expression in her dark eyes which Petronilla felt. She wondered if her Majesty—like herself—ever suffered the pangs of homesickness.

"Who are you, my child?" asked the queen abruptly.

"Petronilla de Velasco, your Majesty," replied the little girl, kneeling at the queen's feet.

"I thought it must be one of that family," mused Eleanor, gazing before her with dreamy eyes.

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Then, to the child: "You may rise and stand before me. Where did you obtain that perfume?"

"It belonged to the ladies of our family, your Majesty, of our father's family, and only they knew how to make it; but my mother found the secret and before I came away from my home she made a quantity of it for my pomander-box."

"You are, then, of the family of the Constable of Castile?"

"Yes, your Majesty, the Constable of Castile, the friend of Queen Isabella, was our great-grandfather."

"And now I know why that fragrance carried me in a moment back to the distant past," said Eleanor in her quiet, even tones, turning to her ladies. "This child's grandmother was lady-in-waiting to my own mother, and she ever carried a pomander-box containing that delightful mixture."

Petronilla was aware of this fact, having been so informed by the Señora Velasco. She also knew the sad fate of the queen's mother, who, at first eccentric, became insane and was called *Juanna la Loca*, or Jane the Insane, a name by which she is still designated in Spain.

"Are you all alone at court?" asked the queen graciously.

"No, your Majesty. My twin brother, Pedro, is with me."

"Surely. I now recall the fact that I observed

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you one day at the hunt and remarked the resemblance between you."

"If it please your Grace," said one of the ladies, who, like the queen, was a Spanish woman, "I think I can tell you the facts of this child's parentage. Her father, Don Hernandez de Velasco, eloped with and married a girl of low family living in Pamplona."

Never had Petronilla felt so hurt, never had she been so indignant. Her beautiful, gentle mother to be alluded to in this manner, as one would speak of a scullery maid! She was in the royal presence, she could make no reply, and though she bit her lip hard her eyes filled with tears.

"Peace, Ysabel!" chid the queen sharply. "I think it would afford you pleasure to torture an imprisoned butterfly." Then, with her eyes half veiled in a side glance, she added maliciously: "If I be not deceived by this treacherous memory of mine, there was a whisper that the parents were planning a marriage between the Doña Ysabel and this little one's father, and that, yielding to the charms of the beautiful daughter of a Pamplona merchant, he disappeared for ever from the court of Spain."

Petronilla could have kissed the queen's very shoes for this remark, while the lady-in-waiting colored and looked as if she would very much like to make a reply; but not daring to do so, she

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was obliged to swallow her wrath as best she might.

Eleanor drew Petronilla toward her and touched the little girl's forehead with her lips. "A perfume has the power to bring back memories of the past," she said; "and as I breathe the fragrance of yours I am once more a happy little child."

Petronilla realized by instinct that whatever a sovereign admires must be surrendered forthwith, and she asked hesitatingly: "Would your Majesty please to accept this pomander-box? It is the very same that my grandmother carried."

"No, oh, no! I would not deprive you of it. But if you have a quantity of the mixture which it contains, you may send a little of it to me by your brother."

The queen rose and moved away with her ladies, and Petronilla sped away to her own room, where she had a package of the odorous herbs and spices wrapped in many folds of linen to keep the scent from being wasted.

But she was puzzled how to arrange it to send to her Majesty. She ran out to consult Pedro, who had been holding the arrows and attending the Duchess of Cleves as she practised archery.

"I thought," said Pedro, when his sister had explained, "that no one ever was to carry that perfume but the ladies of our house."

"But we surely will share it with a queen, you

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silly fellow!" said Petronilla, while Fabien, who came along in time to hear the discussion, said: "You may be glad that you have something that her Majesty wants. A good many people would give their very eyes to be allowed to make her a present, no matter what it would cost, and all you are asked to give is a handful of old dried leaves."

The little girl did not take time to resent this disrespectful mention of the family perfume, but returned to the question of a receptacle for the portion which she was to present to her Majesty. She had a small satin bag embroidered with gold thread, which she thought might do, but Fabien scorned the idea of sending such an article to the queen. "What, that old rag? Why, you ought to put it in a gold box with the queen's monogram in diamonds."

"I do not own a box with the queen's monogram on it, as you ought to know very well, and I have not the money to buy one. Oh, dear, I did not know what a terrible thing it is to make a present to a queen, and I do hope I haven't anything else she wants. I am going to ask madame what I should do about it."

The marquise was engaged in trying on a gown to be worn at the archery exercises on the following day, consequently she was very much absorbed in her own affairs.

The gown was of green satin peppered with gold roses and, as could be seen with half an eye,

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it was a good deal too small for the lady who was trying to get into it. "It is not really too small, do you think, Félice?" she asked for the twentieth time; and the maid, knowing what was expected of her, replied: "Not at all, Madame, not in the least." But the fact remained that, pull as she would, the bodice failed to come together by about three inches.

"Get that cord and tie it about me as tightly as you can!" cried the marquise. The maid wound the cord about the rotund figure of her mistress and pulled the ends in opposite directions, while Petronilla was told to button the bodice. The child had secured the two lower buttons, when the cord slipped from Félice's hand and off flew the buttons!

"Never in all my life did I see such careless minxes!" cried the usually good-natured marquise; and, seizing from the dressing-table a small hand-mirror of polished steel, she gave each of them a crack over the head with it.

The maid whimpered, Petronilla sat on the floor and wept, while the marquise sank into a chair and fanned her crimson face with her handkerchief, disappointed because, do what she would, she could not give herself a slender figure, and angry with herself because she had lost her temper.

Had she been struck by one who was habitually unkind to her, the little girl would not have minded it so much. But the sunny-tempered old mar-

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quise, whose name she mentioned every night and morning in her prayers and for whom she cherished a genuine affection,—well, it was too much! and though the blow had been by no means a severe one, Petronilla continued to cry because it had been dealt by the marquise.

But already sorry and ashamed, the good marquise quickly recovered her temper. "Félice," she said mildly, "put a loose robe on me and take that gown to the tailor and tell him to set large pieces in the seams under the arms. After all, even if it could have been brought together, I never could have drawn a bow with it on, for I am stout, and there is no use in trying to deny the fact."

When the maid had left the room she said: "Nilla, my child, dry your tears and forget the bad temper of an old woman." The injured one rose to her feet with what might be termed a rainy smile, for her mouth dimpled though her eyes were wet.

"That is right," said the old lady, smiling in her turn. "And now tell me, did the Duchess of Cleves send you to me on an errand?"

"No, Madame, she does not need me at present, and I have come to you for advice,"—and she stated the object of her visit.

"I wonder if I have anything that would do," said the marquise thoughtfully. "Stay! I have the very thing. Nilla, you may think it almost beyond belief, but when a young girl I was hand-

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some, I was slender and I had a host of suitors. Among them was a Spanish nobleman, and he once gave me a gold casket, on which is engraved the arms of his country."

She brought a writing-case from a table in the corner of the room, and, after searching in one of its compartments, took from it a gold box on the lid of which were the lion and castle of Spain surrounded by a vine in fine tracery. "Put your perfume in that, my child. The arms will be a delicate compliment to her Majesty, who, though Queen of France, never forgets that she is Spanish; and as you also are of that race it will be doubly appropriate. No, do not say a word; I want you to have it, and it is thus that I appease my conscience for having struck you for something for which you were in no way responsible."

Pedro took the box with its fragrant contents to the queen and returned to his sister very much elated. "Her Majesty asked me a great many questions about our people," he said, "and she sent you this,"—and he handed Petronilla a locket set with pearls.

Petronilla was delighted, for it is not every day that one receives a present from a queen; but she said, "I am going to send this to our mother as soon as I can. We see many lovely things and we wear the finest of clothes, but our poor mother is shut up in the mountains where she has nothing pretty to look at and she wears the plainest of

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gowns. She will not wear this, I think, but she will put it away and will be glad to know that it is the gift of her Majesty."

"You are right, Nilla, that is just what I thought you would do."

At the archery contest on the following day Pedro had the honor of holding the bow and arrows of Catherine de' Medici. If there is one thing more than another that a boy loves, it is a bow. Pedro examined this one carefully and wished very much that he owned one like it. This weapon is described as being of ebony traced with the fleur-de-lis, the lily of France; it was ornamented with steel and damaskeened with gold. It was engraved with the letter "C," and upon one end of it was carved the head of the dauphin.

Very pretty the young and graceful court-ladies appeared when indulging in this sport, but none enjoyed it more than the Marquise de Tallanges, who, having been an expert in her youth, made some very good shots, which she certainly could not have done had not her tailor made some alterations in her gown.

CHAPTER XXIV

HER MAJESTY CONSULTS THE ASTROLOGER

The week of merriment which celebrated the nuptials of the Duke of Cleves and the Princess Jeanne was now ended and the King and Queen of Navarre were to return to their own country, taking with them their little daughter, who was to remain with them for some years before joining her husband. Francis no longer wished his niece to remain in the grim palace-castle of Plessis-les-Tours, for, having seen her safely married according to his own wishes, there was now no need to fear a marriage planned by the King of Spain.

It was with some regret that the twins thought of leaving the court of France, where all was life and gaiety, for the more quiet court of Navarre; and Fabien exulted in the fact that he was to remain in France. "I am very glad my grandmother is to stay here," said the boy; "everything in Navarre will seem on a very small scale now. Even the queen seems gayer here."

"That is because she is so fond of her brother, the king, that she is happiest by his side," said his grandmother.

A complication now rose that made the Velasco

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twins very unhappy, and it seemed for a time that the swinging of her pomander-box that day in the salon was to prove Petronilla's undoing. Queen Eleanor had taken a fancy to Pedro and wished to retain him for her own page. Not only did she consider this boy, with his brilliant dark eyes, his curling golden hair and his graceful, courteous manner, a picturesque figure in her train, but she had discovered that, thanks to the careful teaching of Brother François, Pedro had received a better education than any of her pages, and even better than many of her ladies. He also wrote a plain hand and had a pleasant, musical voice for reading aloud, and so she asked the Queen of Navarre to allow the boy to remain in her service. This request Marguerite graciously granted, and many were the congratulations showered upon the boy by the old marquise.

"When I took you from that old, tumble-down castle I had not expected so great an honor for you!" she cried. "I felt that the Queen of Navarre would want to place you in her daughter's suite, but to be page to the Queen of France! My dear boy, your fortune is made! But why are you not dancing with joy at your good luck, instead of looking as serious as a monk at the beginning of a week's fast?"

"Because, Madame la Marquise, Nilla must return to Navarre without me."

"That is true,—I had not thought about Nilla.

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I was not cruel enough to separate you, was I? Nor was your mother, though I fancy it must almost have broken her heart to part from her girl as well as her boy."

"But I will not go to Navarre alone," sobbed Petronilla. "I wish I had never taken that pomander-box out of my room; then her Majesty would not have sent for Pedro and she would not have noticed him or thought of what a beautiful page he would make. Why must a queen have everything to make her happy? Why must she even take my brother from me?"

"Fie, fie!" said the marquise. "You must not give way like that. There is no use in railing at circumstances and tracing events back step by step in that way, as you will discover as you grow older. As for a queen having everything that can make her happy, that is a mistake. There are many women in this world who are happier than Eleanor of France or Marguerite of Navarre, I dare say. And you must not be selfish. Remember that this post will be a great advantage to your brother."

"I do not want him to give it up, Madame. I want to stay here with him."

If Petronilla had entertained a greater degree of affection for her little mistress she would have been more resigned to leave her brother and go to the court of Navarre. But Jeanne, who as a rule had seemed to be kind-hearted and just, had fits

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of ill-temper, when she was very difficult to please,—a state of mind which had been greatly aggravated by her betrothal and marriage; and although the little girl admired and stood in awe of the small duchess, she did not really love her.

“I know of a position it will give you great joy to fill later,” said the marquise, who seemed to take Petronilla’s distress to heart, “and I should be glad to keep you with me until that time comes, for you are fully as useful to me as your brother; but of course it must be as Queen Marguerite wishes.”

“Oh, Madame, can not you induce her Majesty of Navarre to let me stay here with you? When I first spoke with her I told her that I had come with my brother because I could not be separated from him, and she seemed to understand. She has forgotten it now, because she has so many things to think of; but you will speak to her about it, will you not?”

“Very well. I will see what I can do, but it will be difficult to get an audience with her Majesty just now. Do not build your hopes upon it, for the queen will think of her daughter first of all, and if she thinks it will be best for her Highness to have your companionship for a few years nothing I can say will be of any avail.”

Petronilla was overjoyed at this promise of the marquise to intercede for her, but the things we most desire seem to drag and creep on their way

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to us, and her good friend tried, without avail, many times during the day to obtain an interview with the Queen of Navarre. The little girl wrung her hands in an agony of fear, for they were to depart to-morrow and then it would be too late. Already her gowns, her shoes and other belongings were placed ready for their boxes, and it seemed as if she surely must go.

Finally a page came to say that her Majesty of Navarre was pleased to grant an audience with the Marquise de Tallanges, and after what seemed to the twins to be a very long time, the good old lady returned with the news of her success written across her beaming face, for they could tell at once that she had succeeded in her undertaking.

"Her Majesty is the sweetest of women," she cried, "and none better understands the love of a sister for a brother. I think I put the matter before her very cleverly. I pictured your grief at being separated when I at first mentioned taking Pedro away from your home; then I dwelt upon the fact that there was nothing more unselfish than the love of a sister, and I led up to the scheme I had in my mind for you. Her gracious Majesty yielded, though she said she was more than satisfied with what she had heard of your conduct and had made up her mind that you should grow up in the service of the young duchess."

Petronilla gratefully kissed the hand of the marquise, whom she thanked from her heart, and

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when alone with her brother the two danced for joy at their good fortune, which, though at times seeming to swerve from its course, followed them wherever they went.

Jeanne parted from her little companion with sincere expressions of regret and presented her with a number of valuable keepsakes, while her royal mother left for Pedro and Petronilla each a generous sum of money.

As this little lady now has passed out of the story, a few words regarding her after life may not be out of place. Finding that Jeanne's marriage had ceased to be an advantage to him, Francis caused it to be annulled; and when she grew into womanhood Jeanne d'Albret wedded the man of her choice, and afterward was the mother of the great Henry of Navarre.

It is probable that at the time of the wedding just described Jeanne and Catherine de' Medici thought very little about each other, not dreaming how they were to clash in the years to come.

When the young Duchess of Cleves, overwhelmed with presents by her royal uncle, had taken her departure with her parents and their household, Francis began to grow restless and to long for a change of scene. It was characteristic of this monarch that he did not like to stay long in one place, and during his reign his court was a royal caravan traveling from palace to palace. So the tapestry, furniture, curtains and beds were

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taken out and placed on the backs of beasts of burden; the court ladies entered their litters or mounted mules as it pleased them; the gay cavaliers sprang to the backs of their prancing steeds; the escort of archers took their places; the soldiers were ready; the king's hounds, his falconers and the countless servants, who in different capacities ministered to his pleasures and needs, awaited his Majesty's signal to start. Then Francis, blithe and gay at the prospect of new sports, stepped forth and, reaching the horse that with arched neck stood pawing the earth with impatience, disdained the stirrup held for him and vaulted into the saddle.

Then away swept the magnificent procession, all a-glitter in the light of the morning sun; and perhaps some peasant, journeying from the more rugged and less favored regions of France, upon beholding this splendid pageant would rub his eyes and imagine himself to be dreaming. Thus they traveled, and history tells of the banquets under the trees, where tables were set for hundreds of guests, and of the affability of the king, who, seated under the boughs with his court about him, told stories of the days of chivalry and recited from his favorite *Romance of the Rose*.

Children are fond of excitement and change, and to the Velasco twins this was an ideal way to live. Very likely there were people at court who agreed with them, but ambassadors who came

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from distant countries grumbled among themselves at the difficulty of obtaining a word with this sovereign, who seemed to think of nothing but his own pleasure.

Pedro now occupied a very enviable position in the train of Queen Eleanor. He was at the head of her pages and the one whom she always addressed, and she always spoke to him in Spanish. The marquise, who took a great deal of interest in his progress, gave the boy much wholesome advice. In the previous reign, as we are informed by historians, the queen of Louis the Twelfth had been much annoyed by the antics of her chief page, who, when he rode out with her, used to trot off out of hearing and was often whipped for his tricks. But, following the counsel of the marquise, young Velasco saved his pranks for his hours of recreation, and in her Majesty's presence he was as grave and sedate as a young monk.

One day after their return to Paris the queen ordered Pedro to accompany her on a visit to an astrologer.

During the sixteenth century this little planet of ours, which we now know might be wiped out of existence and never be missed from among the other worlds, was supposed to be the center of the universe and to be influenced by the stars, and it was believed that its inhabitants could read the secrets of the future in the starry book of the heavens. The astrologer interpreted the meaning

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of what he read in the blue depths above him, and very often he also studied alchemy and varied his pursuits by searching for the philosopher's stone, by mixing poisons and love philters, and by seeking to compound the elixir of life,—a wonderful mixture destined to keep people for ever young.

On this particular occasion the queen took but one of her ladies, for the expedition was to be as secret as possible, and the three rode mules,—animals very much used at this time, even by royalty.

In the crowded thoroughfare they were obliged to stop for some minutes and Pedro, riding in front, found that the cause of the crowd was a company of soldiers, conducting a number of malefactors to execution,—a sight which, though not an unusual one, never failed to attract attention on the streets of Paris.

As Pedro paused, the mournful procession was also prevented for a time from continuing its way by the throng which surged and crowded close to it; and there, near enough for him to touch, was the man with the scar! But the man no longer was dangerous, for he was one of the doomed. He recognized the boy at once, and his brows knit together in a scowl of malice.

“And so, my little popinjay, it is you!” he exclaimed. “You can ride about fat and well-dressed, whilst your betters must go to their death.”

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At this moment a guard struck him across the shoulders and roughly bade him be quiet.

"You speak as if my good fortune were the cause of your ill-luck," replied the queen's page; "but I never harmed you, as you well know, though you have ill-used me. I should like to have you know that I pity you now and forgive you."

"You are well rid of a bad acquaintance, my friend," said a bystander to Pedro. "That rascal is an outlaw and a murderer and the officers of justice have wanted him for some time."

The soldiers and the prisoners now moved on and Pedro knew that the man with the scar had ceased to do harm for evermore.

The astrologer who was honored by a visit from the queen was a man in the prime of life, with a long, black beard and an eye as keen as that of a falcon. He wore a dark robe and a velvet cap, and was surrounded by globes, compasses and open books of parchment containing pictures of the sun, comets and other heavenly bodies.

Both the queen and her lady-in-waiting wore heavy veils, and it was agreed that they should not reveal their identity, or, at least, if the astrologer should suspect that he was in the presence of the queen he should be in doubt as to which of them was her Majesty, for the lady-in-waiting was of the same height and complexion as Queen Eleanor.

In order to make the deception more complete,

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her Majesty allowed Doña Ysabel—for it was the same lady who had so offended Petronilla—to be the first to have her horoscope cast. It is doubtful if the wise man was deceived for a moment, for that class of people are obliged to have all their wits about them, and he treated both ladies with respectful deference. He talked a great deal about the House of Life, and the other Houses; and of the Sign of the Zodiac which rose above the horizon at the moment of the Lady Ysabel's birth. He told her that she had a high position at court, but not the highest; that she had been woefully soured by a disappointment in her youth, and that she never had been and never would be married. "You were not in your first bloom when you met with this great disappointment," he said; "you were ten years older than your rival."

This kind of talk was extremely distasteful to the lady, who said that, having heard he had discovered the elixir of life in his researches in the field of alchemy, she would like a vial, to find if he had made as great a mistake in its manufacture as he had made in her own history.

Nothing daunted, the learned man brought from his laboratory a tiny bottle containing a liquid, green as an emerald. "This is more precious than melted jewels, Madame," said he, "as only this small quantity was the result of my concoction, which never again may have the same result."

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"Has it ever been tried?" asked the lady, forgetting her irritation in the contemplation of this wonderful medicine.

"It never has been tried on a human being, Madame," said the astrologer gravely, "for the quantity here contained would only suffice for two persons; but I tried a small portion of it on a hen."

Pedro was wondering if the elixir had killed the hen, when Doña Ysabel asked: "And with what result?"

"It was marvelous, it was wonderful!" returned the learned man in a low deep voice. "The fowl was old, with ragged feathers and a pale comb. I put as much as would adhere to the tip of a knife on a piece of bread and gave it to her, and in three days she had lost every feather and was as bare as your ladyship's hand."

"And then?" asked Doña Ysabel breathlessly.

"Then the feathers came in as glossy as satin and the comb became crimson."

Pedro, who was fond of sifting every question to the bottom, would have liked to ask if the fowl was tough when brought to the table, but of course it was not for him to speak a word until he was spoken to.

Doña Ysabel purchased the elixir at a price which emptied her purse and caused her to groan, for she loved money dearly. But gold is mere dross when compared to sunny youth, and she felt that if she could be as thoroughly rejuvenated as

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the hen, she had that morning made the bargain of her life.

It was now the turn of her Majesty to have her fate read, and the degree of deference with which the astrologer handed her to a chair would have convinced any one who was not willing to be deceived that he was perfectly well aware of this lady's exalted rank. The probabilities are that he had confederates among the palace servants, who kept him informed of all that went on within its walls, and that he had anticipated this visit.

He told the queen of a long line of illustrious ancestors. Upon her brow he said two crowns had rested, and the future held for her bliss and power untold. Then he added mysteriously: "The life of one you love is threatened by one who is near to you."

The queen gave a faint cry at this, and when, at the close of the interview, the astrologer handed her a slip of parchment on which four lines were written in red ink, Eleanor slipped it unread into the bosom of her habit and, motioning to Pedro to pay for the predictions from a purse he carried for that purpose, her Majesty hurried to the door.

When they had returned to the palace the queen told Pedro to come to her oratory, where none ever followed her. "This script is not very legible," she said, producing the piece of parchment, "and my sight is not what it once was. Read it, boy; I am willing to trust you."

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Pedro took it and read:

“A great king is threatened with death in a strange city.

An enemy with a smiling face is like a worm concealed in the heart of a rose.

It may be granted to a page to lift a load of sorrow from a queen’s heart.

A warning given in time is like armor and shield.”

This was written like a verse, a capital letter beginning each line, which may or may not have had any connection with any other line. It was in this same way that Nostradamus, the favorite astrologer of Catherine de’ Medici, wrote his predictions, which would fit almost any circumstance, according to the state of mind of the person trying to interpret them.

Queen Eleanor was very much agitated by these lines. She covered her face with her hands for a moment and, with a signal for the boy to leave her, knelt before the crucifix of carved ivory which hung over the altar.

Bound in honor not to confide even to his sister what he had seen and heard that day, Pedro wondered much concerning it. Of course he was not in advance of his times, and he believed in astrology and alchemy, and fully expected to see the wrinkles about the eyes of Doña Ysabel smooth out, and her faded cheek become round and full and glow with the bloom of youth, instead of with the bloom applied, often too lavishly, by her maid. When this transformation did not take

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place he concluded she had been afraid to take the green drops, for which she had paid so exorbitant a price. The boy wondered what the world would be if all the old people could be made to look very young. They still would be old in years, despite their appearance; for years can not be set back as one sets a clock, and people thus made over, he thought, would be very much like counterfeit gold pieces. The boy made up his mind that it was just as well the elixir was too expensive to be purchased by any but the very rich.

That winter in Paris was an exciting one to the Velasco twins.

There were pageants and masks and balls, and, most remarkable of all, conflicts between wild animals given for the entertainment of the king, who loved to see a fight between the bears, lions and tigers, and sometimes a bull and bear alone would fight each other to the death.

The minds of thoughtful people recognized at this time the march of events of far more importance than the amusement of the king and his court. A struggle was going on between two great religions, the history of which the readers of this story will understand as they grow older.

Pedro and Petronilla, who had seen but few pictures of any kind during their short and secluded lives, were fond of looking at those purchased by the king. Francis was so great a lover of art that when Raphael's *Saint Michael* and

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Holy Family were brought to Paris they received a solemn reception, like that given to a great and living person. It has been said—and denied, so one does not know what to believe—that one of the greatest of painters, Leonardo da Vinci, died in the king's arms. Certain it is that Francis bought for four thousand crowns the *Mona Lisa*, by this artist, and it hangs in the Louvre to-day—one of the most celebrated pictures in the world. Before this picture the twins often stood, trying to understand just what the painted lips seemed to be wanting to say to them. "It is the same look I often have seen on the face of our mother," said Petronilla, "when we told her a fairy-tale that we had heard from Tomas or Jules. She did not believe it, you see, but she did not want us to know that she doubted it."

And thus they speculated about each work of art and believed that Raphael must have seen the saint so lightly poised on the body of the dragon.

CHAPTER XXV

CHARLES THE FIFTH IN FRANCE—WHAT HAPPENED TO PEDRO

Charles the Fifth of Spain wanted to visit Ghent, which was a part of his domain, and, being afraid to go by sea on account of the English ships, and not caring to go through Germany for fear of some trouble with the Protestant states, he was invited by Francis to travel through France, which was the shortest route,—an invitation which the Spanish sovereign accepted.

These two monarchs, as we have seen, had been enemies, and although they were now brothers-in-law and had made many protestations of friendship, they did not love each other even yet. Henri, the dauphin, hated Charles, for he was one of the boys who had been sent to Spain as a hostage and he could not forget his long imprisonment, when he had prayed every day to be released. So it is no wonder that Brusquet, the court fool, chuckled as he opened the calendar which he kept for the purpose of inscribing in it the names of greater fools than himself, and wrote the name of the Spanish king, deeming the latter a fool for trusting himself in France.

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When, with a grin of satisfaction, he showed the name to his royal master, Francis asked: "And what would you say, fool, if I should allow the King of Spain to pass through my realm without let or hindrance?"

"In that case, cousin," returned Brusquet, "I should erase his name and write your own in its place."*

But Charles started on his way through France, taking with him a very small retinue, willing, apparently, to trust to the good faith of his quondam adversary.

The royal guest was received at every town with the greatest pomp and ceremony and was met at Loches by Francis himself. After embracing as if they adored instead of distrusting each other, the two monarchs traveled together, stopping at various palaces. The lively French court provided every variety of diversion that a monarch could enjoy and possibly a good many that bored the Spaniard, who was inclined to be serious and cared but little for any kind of entertainment save that provided by the table, for he possessed a remarkable appetite.

The Velasco twins had pictured the King of Spain as tall and handsome, and they were greatly surprised to find him short and somewhat lame,

* This retort has been attributed to Triboulet, but later writers contend that this jester belonged to the earlier part of the reign, and that it was Brusquet who originated the Fool's Calendar.

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for his love of good things had brought with it occasional severe nips of the gout. His lower jaw protruded, his lips were thick and his mouth was always open, showing his teeth. But he was very dignified and his manner was so gentle it was hard to believe that this king was cruel, and that he set no value upon human life when it suited his purpose to destroy it.

Charles expressed himself as being delighted with all he saw. The Château de Chambord with its carved salamanders and other wonders pleased him very much, and he must have been charmed with beautiful Fontainebleau with its majestic forest, where he might enjoy the pleasures of the hunt. And he must have been gratified by the reception given him in Paris, where the people, taking the cue from their king, welcomed him with joyous acclaim.

Queen Eleanor was delighted to be in the company of her brother, of whom she was very fond, though she did not cherish for him the sentiment of idolatry manifested by Marguerite of Navarre for Francis.

Pedro, constantly at the beck and call of the queen, could see that she was worried, and it is reasonable to suppose that she had her doubts of the sincerity of the friendship shown by Francis for his royal brother-in-law. But the day before the Spanish sovereign took his departure from Paris something happened to Pedro, which, for

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the time, concentrated all his thoughts upon himself.

It was at the end of a grand banquet and Francis was telling a story, as usual, of the days of chivalry. In the most thrilling portion of the narrative the king rose to his feet, and, in order the better to illustrate the scene he was describing, he drew his dagger from its sheath and swung it in the air. When he had lifted it to the highest point the dagger slipped from his hand and struck Pedro, who was standing behind the queen's chair. The boy had stepped backward as the weapon fell, otherwise it might have been mortal. As it was, the point of the sharp blade pierced his cheek, inflicting a painful wound.

"By the Mass!" exclaimed the king in dismay, when he saw what he had done. But the queen's page possessed the soul of a soldier; pressing his handkerchief to his cheek with one hand he quickly recovered the dagger with the other and, kneeling, restored it to his Majesty.

"Well done!" said Francis, adding kindly: "Retire, my lad, and send for a physician,"—a command which the boy was very glad to obey.

The physician stanched the blood and applied a healing lotion. "It will not leave a scar," said he, "thanks to my knowledge of the science of healing. And that is fortunate for you, my boy, for it would be a pity to have your beauty marred."

Petronilla, who had not been present when the

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accident occurred, wept bitterly at beholding her brother's bandaged face. He laughed at her and told her that when he grew up he, no doubt, would often feel the point of an enemy's blade much more severely than he now felt the accidental thrust of the king's dagger, and assured her that many would have been willing to meet with a worse mishap in order to win a word of praise from his Majesty. But the wound was very painful, nevertheless, and all night long he tossed uneasily on his couch, unable to sleep until near the approach of dawn.

Pedro was of course excused from duty by the queen, who made kindly inquiries concerning him, and ordered that nourishing broth be made for her favorite page.

In the afternoon of the following day the boy was surprised to see her Majesty and her confidential friend, the Doña Ysabel, enter his room.

"Boy," said Eleanor, "do you think your wound will permit you to undertake a journey for me?"

"I am not too ill to serve your gracious Majesty," returned Pedro, kneeling at her feet.

"My brother, the King of Spain, has taken his departure and will rest to-night at an hostelry some three or four hours' ride from Paris. I have heard of a plot to arrest his Majesty at Chantilly. I greatly fear that it may be worse than merely to arrest him, for you may remember the prediction of the astrologer concerning the king and his smil-

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ing enemy. It is plainly revealed to me that you are the page who must warn him, for none of the others is so trustworthy as yourself.

"It is but an hour since they departed, and the king is traveling to-day in a litter, so they are not moving rapidly. You may therefore overtake them without difficulty if you start at once. Deliver this letter to any one of my brother's suite, for they are all faithful, and may God speed you."

"It is unfortunate that the lad's face is so swathed in linen," said the Doña Ysabel. "Stay, I know something of healing and I can treat a wound in a more satisfactory manner than a bungling leech."

She left the room and soon returned bearing a leather box. Then with deft fingers she untied the bandages, moistening with cool water the linen next the flesh. Cutting a piece of brown plaster, she covered the wound with it, and although it made a dark and unsightly blotch on the fair face of the boy, he now presented a better appearance than he had done under the treatment of the doctor. But he was less comfortable than he had been, for the plaster irritated instead of soothing the wound.

Pedro donned a plain dark suit, for he was instructed to wear nothing which would distinguish him as the queen's page, and he slipped the letter under the lining of his cap. Doña Ysabel gave him a well-filled purse and told him of an inn where he was to stop in case he should be delayed on his

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return trip; after which the boy hurried down to the gate where a horse was held for him by a silent groom. The cool air blowing in his face refreshed and revived him, and, mounting the restless steed, which seemed as anxious to start as if it had known the importance of the errand, Pedro sped away on his mission.

Brusquet, the court fool, was not needed, for the king was playing at cards and, being sufficiently amused by the game, cared not at all for jests. The jester had been asleep on the floor of the gilded salon with a rich rug wrapped about him and his head pillow'd in a nest of silken cushions. He rose, yawned and lounged down the length of the corridor to a window, where he stood gazing dreamily out, tapping on the glass with his long nails. Then he saw a little brown form moving swiftly across the courtyard below. Brusquet was French to the backbone and he hated the queen and everything Spanish. He had, moreover, a malicious curiosity concerning all her Majesty's attendants. This boy, who at first seemed to be a stranger, he soon recognized as the queen's favorite page. The fact that Pedro was clothed in inconspicuous garb, instead of the rich apparel in which he usually appeared, excited Brusquet's suspicions in a moment. He stole silently down a rear stairway, entered the courtyard and reached the gateway just as the horse and its rider were disappearing in the distance.

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Brusquet uttered an imprecation anent his own stupidity at not having more closely observed the groom who now had vanished. Among the great number of men about the stables he would find it difficult to identify and to question him. He surmised at once that Queen Eleanor was sending a message to her royal brother, and he had reason to know that Francis would not approve of any secret communication between the two, for Brusquet was very keen in some respects and was well aware of the fact that Francis distrusted the King of Spain.

The jester was fond of a row when he was not brought into it, and he liked to see his Majesty boiling with rage and throwing things about. He now leered cunningly and his small eyes gleamed with malice.

But as Brusquet watched Pedro, some one watched Brusquet, and that was Doña Ysabel, who hastened to the queen's apartments at once.

"The king's fool knows that your page has departed, Madame," said she, "and he will tell his master, for he owns a prattling tongue."

Eleanor stood still in the middle of the room with her hands clasped helplessly. "But we must deny it," she said at last; "we must say that the fool was mistaken and that the boy is ill of his wound and remains in his bed."

The lady-in-waiting shook her head. "If the king begins to investigate, Madame, he will go

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to the page's apartment himself; and, as your Majesty well knows, his anger is not pleasant when roused."

"Then what shall we do?" whispered the queen.

"We can get some one to take his place."

"That would be of no avail; the king is not easily deceived."

"Your Majesty has not forgotten the girl, the boy's twin sister, now in the suite of the Marquise de Tallanges? I will dress the girl in her brother's clothes and defy his Majesty to tell the difference."

"But will he not suspect?"

"He will suspect nothing; I do not believe he is aware of the girl's existence, and of late the resemblance has not been so apparent on account of a close cap she has worn, which entirely conceals her hair and—but I must fetch her at once, for there is no time to be lost."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE KING SENDS FOR THE QUEEN'S PAGE

Petronilla, who of course knew nothing of her brother's departure, was peacefully engaged with her embroidery frame beside the marquise, who was similarly employed.

"Her Majesty has sent for this girl and you must upon no account reveal the fact that she is not in your apartments," said Doña Ysabel abruptly, and with the authority of one who speaks in the name of the queen.

"Pedro, is he worse?" cried the little girl, rising hurriedly and scattering her embroidery silks about.

"Your brother is almost recovered. Come."

"Yes, go at once, my child, as the queen commands," said the marquise, "and in everything do as you are told."

Locked within the page's room Doña Ysabel threw off the close cap the child wore and loosened her soft hair; then she unbuttoned the little dress and almost before she was aware of it Petronilla stood clothed in a page's suit of pale yellow silk slashed with velvet.

"This disguise is to save her Majesty from great

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annoyance," explained the lady-in-waiting, as she finished the costume by fastening a small dagger to Petronilla's side; "and until you are permitted to take off this garb you must pretend to be your brother."

"But, my brother,—what has become of him?" asked the little girl with quivering lips, for she could not understand this singular proceeding.

"He is gone on a secret errand and you are to take his place. Now do you understand?"

"Yes, Madame, and I will do my best to be like him."

"That is right; and now the queen must see you, for never in my life did I behold so remarkable a resemblance."

Queen Eleanor held up both hands in amazement. "It surely is the boy himself! It was a happy thought, Ysabel, but the wound—what of that? Shall we pretend that it was cured by a miracle?"

"No, Madame, such a statement would excite so much comment that it would lead to discovery. It is a great pity the accident should have occurred just at this time, when it is so necessary that the girl should resemble the page; but I have thought of a way out of the difficulty. I will give the child a wound like that of her brother."

Petronilla stepped back in dismay and even the queen looked startled, but Doña Ysabel laughed and, taking up her sharp knife, cut a piece of plaster similar to the one she had prepared for Pedro.

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This she laid across the peach-like cheek of his sister. "And now," she exclaimed triumphantly, "the resemblance is complete and perfect!"

"Remain here, child," said the queen, "unless you are called for. Let us not involve ourselves in a tangle of deceit unless it be necessary."

While royalty sat at supper Brusquet lay under the table, as it sometimes pleased him to do, popping his head out when struck by a brilliant idea. To-night, however, he had said nothing, and the king, who seemed to be in an unusually good humor, commented upon his silence.

"I was meditating, cousin, upon the strange ways of kings," returned the fool from under the table.

"As how?" asked his master lazily.

Brusquet crept out and sat with his leering face on a level with the board as he replied: "I am wondering, cousin, why, when you have a host of messengers of your own, you should have sent a little page boy, Cousin Eleanor's page, by the way, with a letter to Charles."

Francis flashed a glance at the queen. She had raised a goblet to her lips and, although she had been momently expecting an outburst from Brusquet, her nerves were so unstrung by anxiety and suspense that the goblet fell from her trembling hand, staining the cloth with red wine.

Seemingly unconscious of this accident Francis turned to the jester again. "Those blinking eyes

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have deceived you, fool. I sent no message to the King of Spain."

"A fool can see as well as a king," persisted Brusquet. "The page, the pretty Spaniard whom you poked so daintily with your dagger and who in consequence was ornamented with a dark rag pasted over his face, this afternoon sped across the courtyard, mounted his swift steed and flew away as if chased by ten thousand devils. And what is more wonderful still, he had not yet returned at nightfall, when all good little boys should be tucked safely in bed."

"Your joke is stupid," said Francis quietly; "you should take something to sharpen your wits."

Eleanor drew a deep breath of relief, while Brusquet scowled with disappointment. It was very annoying to find the king's anger could not be roused. It would be amusing to see him lose his temper at the table where there were dishes to throw, and he would have rejoiced at the discomfiture of the queen.

But when they had returned to the gilded salon Francis asked with apparent carelessness: "By the way, how fares the boy I wounded yesterday?"

"Indifferently well," replied the queen. "I hope there is no danger of a fever,—and there may not be if he remains in quiet and seclusion for a few days."

She had said too much; she was not a good actress.

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"Fie!" replied the king, "he should not be rolled up in wool for a scratch like that. Send for him that I may see for myself how he fares."

The ladies and gentlemen of the court, ever quick to suspect, realized that something was wrong and awaited with impatience the return of the messenger who was sent to fetch the wounded page.

Through the doorway came a small figure with head erect, but with large, frightened eyes and a brown mark across one cheek, who stepped lightly across the polished floor and knelt at the king's feet. It was—or so all but three of that brilliant company were ready to affirm,—Pedro Velasco, the queen's page.

With dropped jaw Brusquet stared, unable to believe the evidence of his own eyes. He presented a spectacle so comical that Francis burst into a roar of laughter, in which all present joined.

"What say you now, fool?" asked the king.

"Nothing, cousin," replied the jester sulkily; "when Satan himself begins to work for royalty and sends a changeling to court it is not for the fool to make comments."

"Does your wound pain you, my boy?" asked the king kindly.

"Not at present, Sire," replied poor Petronilla in a low voice, for she was inwardly quaking with fright.

"You shall receive something better from the

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hands of your king than the cut of a dagger," went on Francis; "you may expect it to-morrow."

Petronilla took her place behind the queen, relieved to find that the stratagem, which she did not yet understand, had succeeded so well.

But the next remark made by the king surprised her so much that she was obliged to grasp the back of a chair to keep from falling.

"Our faithful servant and gallant gentleman, the Count de Saint-Victor, is bringing a new beauty to court, I am told. He has arrived from the south and is accompanied by his Béarnaise bride, whom he will present to us this evening."

No wonder the child was ready to faint! Aunt Catalina was coming, now, of all times in the world! Aunt Catalina, who might be deceived by the disguise, but would insist upon knowing where Petronilla could be. And these people were expecting a beauty,—would they laugh when they saw her aunt? Her cheek flushed at the thought, for, although her aunt had never seemed her friend, Petronilla did not want her to be laughed at derisively as they had just mocked Brusquet.

At this moment Petronilla saw the Count de Saint-Victor in the doorway, and very handsome he looked in his rich court-dress, though she scarcely noticed him, so intent was she in trying to get a view of the lady on his arm. But the glimpse she caught of the count's bride satisfied her that it had all been a mistake, for this elegantly



Through the doorway came a small figure

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dressed lady was certainly not Aunt Catalina. Her hair, gathered into a gold net and fastened by a precious stone, was as black as night, while the arms were white and rounded. So much the little girl could see, and she felt relieved when a tall court-lady made a step which obstructed her view, for she did not wish to be observed by the count.

The new arrivals were now bowing before the queen and almost unconsciously Pretonilla raised her eyes. Was she dreaming, or was she going to die? The count's bride was her own mother! Younger, fairer, not the same, yet ever the same dear and lovely mother! It was like the return of a dear one from another world. She longed to reach out her arms and to say, "I am here, your little Nilla," but such a course would cause great harm to her Majesty and to Pedro; it might be at the cost of their lives and her own. For the child felt that there was something very serious at the bottom of this strange masquerade.

But her mother would know her! Those loving eyes could not be deceived. She remembered that once she and Pedro had exchanged costumes in order to play a trick upon their mother, but that she had only to look into their eyes to tell them apart. And what would she say now in her first surprise? Even if the king should not hear, there was the fool ready to listen and tell.

Petronilla turned her head in the hope of being able to whisper to Doña Ysabel, but the latter was

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too far away and there was no time to lose. "Madame," she whispered with white lips to one of the ladies, "implore her Majesty to let me retire, for indeed I feel as if I should die!"

"Indeed, you look ill, my poor lad," said the lady kindly; and turning she said to the queen: "The page, may it please your Majesty, is suffering severely from his wound and is in danger of swooning."

"Tell him to go," said the queen. And, shading her face with her hand lest she should be recognized, Petronilla turned and vanished through the nearest doorway.

But in her room a new difficulty awaited her. The doctor was waiting to dress the wound! Petronilla had not seen him when he had visited her brother, consequently she had not the faintest idea what business this stout old man could have here at this hour.

"What is it you wish, sir?" she inquired wonderingly.

"What is it I wish? What could I wish, young sir, but to minister to your comfort?" asked the old doctor testily, for he was already in an irritable state of mind at being obliged to wait for his patient, whom he had told to remain in his room. "It is rather early to defy your physician, let me tell you," he added still more sourly; "and you look as if you did not even remember having seen me before."

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"Oh, yes, I know who you are, sir," stammered the supposed page.

"I should hope so, indeed, for you do not look like a fool, though you are acting like one in running about like this."

"But it was at the command of the king."

"Then I suppose you could not help yourself, but it is the doctor who should be king of the sick-room. What is that rag you have strung across your face?"

"It is a plaster."

"Am I blind? Can not I see that for myself? What is it there for?"

"It was put there by one of the queen's ladies. I—I—the wound—the king's dagger—you know." She was so confused that she hardly knew what she was saying, for Petronilla had been taught to speak out and tell the truth, and this for her was a very difficult position.

"Saints above!" cried the doctor angrily, "he is telling me that he was wounded, just as if I did not know it already, just as if I had not dressed the wound with my own hands according to the latest discoveries of science! I would have you know, young sir, that I am not one to be so readily ignored."

Petronilla was frightened at this storm of indignation. "I beg your pardon, but you asked me, you know," she said gently.

"Well, I now ask you to come here that I may

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take off that plaster. I do not care if it was put there by the queen herself. What right has anybody to meddle with my case?"

"But the wound is so much better, indeed, it is almost well," said the little girl, trembling with fear lest he should remove the plaster.

"Stuff and nonsense! This is no time for that sort of thing. I shall not put one on for some days to come. It will now be necessary to apply some more of that lotion."

She shrank away, but he seized her by the arm and held her. "This cut will require fully a week longer to heal," he grumbled. "I am surprised that you say it does not pain you, for if it does not hurt with this thing clinging to it you have no more feeling than a frog."

He moistened the plaster, which came off without the least difficulty, disclosing a cheek perfectly sound and without even the sign of a mark. The eyes of the old doctor seemed to be jumping from his head. Here had been an ugly wound which even the pure blood of youth could not have healed in less than a week's time; and now there was not even a trace of it left!

"I knew that lotion would be effective, but I had not an idea that it was miraculous!" he murmured to himself.

"Will you put another plaster on my face, please?" asked his singular patient.

"In the name of goodness, why?"

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"Because, because I—I am fond of having it there," she replied, not knowing what excuse to make.

"Your taste is difficult to understand, as is everything else connected with this most remarkable case. I have no plaster with me and if I had I should not apply it where it is not needed." He stared at her for a moment and then he began to rub his hands together, while a smile spread over his face. "This is a triumph, a great triumph," said he. "I shall bring my colleague to-morrow to see you. He doubted, yes, he actually doubted the virtue of that lotion! He will be surprised, he will be amazed. And now I bid you a very good night."

When he had gone Petronilla found and carefully replaced the plaster which he had thrown on the table. She felt she would be safer as Doña Ysabel had planned matters, for there was no knowing what might happen.

Then the child threw herself on the bed. What was the meaning of all these strange events happening about her? Her mother was in the palace and did not come to her children. Pedro had gone away without a word to her and everything seemed to be crisscross. As she was puzzling her brain to comprehend it all she drifted into the land of Nod, where for a time we are happily at rest from our troubles.

CHAPTER XXVII

AMAZEMENT OF THE DOCTOR AND THE KING'S JESTER

Meanwhile Pedro was rapidly galloping toward Chantilly. Had his wound not pained him he would have been quite happy. He thought of the young Chevalier Bayard and of the boy nine years of age who had offered his services to Louis the Twelfth. He felt he was now doing something of real use and making a fine start in life.

Charles the Fifth and his suite seemed to be traveling more rapidly than had been expected. Pedro had long passed the inn where he was to spend the night and the day was darkening into twilight when he saw them in the distance. As he approached he realized a difficulty for which he was not prepared, and which the queen and her lady in their haste seemed to have overlooked.

Two of the French princes, the dauphin and the Duke of Orleans, were escorting their royal guest, and, as if conferring together, they now rode in the rear. It would be impossible to convey a letter to one of the king's suite without being discovered. Should the two princes continue in their present position, Pedro must ride on to their stopping-

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place, keeping well behind them, and manage in some way to get the letter to the king's own hands before his Majesty slept.

In the course of a half-hour fortune favored the anxious messenger, for the two French princes suddenly separated, and, going forward, took their places on either side of the litter.

Now was Pedro's time to act. He overtook the procession and mingled with the Spanish horsemen, who eyed him with cold surprise. The boy already had taken the letter from his cap and held it concealed in his sleeve. Riding close to one of the men he said in Spanish: "I have something from her Majesty, the Queen of France, to your king."

The man reached out his hand after a quick glance in the direction of the French princes, and Pedro slipped the letter into his keeping. Then, wheeling his horse, the boy rode toward Paris.

It was a very lonely road and it seemed to the excited fancy of the boy that the very owls in the woods hooted a warning to him. He was glad of the practice he had had in riding in his native Béarn, and that his steed was a fleet one. But it was some time after nightfall when he arrived at the inn.

Although he had plenty of gold with which to pay for the best accommodations Pedro refused to go to bed, lest, in spite of his wound, the fatigue he had undergone would cause him to oversleep

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in the morning. So after a comfortable supper he curled up in a chair and awaited the light of day.

The earliest streak of dawn found Pedro on his horse and again flying toward Paris. It was a pale and disheveled boy who dismounted outside the palace gates and gave his horse in charge of the waiting groom, and afterward entered the queen's apartments to tell her that her letter had reached its destination.

Greatly relieved by this assurance, her Majesty complimented her page upon his faithful performance of his task and promised that the future should prove that she was not ungrateful.

Pedro was about to withdraw, when Doña Ysabel hastily entered.

"Wait a while," said she, "until Brusquet has left this wing of the palace. The fool, Madame, has not yet recovered from his suspicions and is watching."

This was true. Brusquet was determined to solve the riddle which had so puzzled him on the previous evening. There were hundreds of horses in the king's stables and it seemed discouraging to attempt an investigation. But by dint of persistent inquiry he had found that a certain horse, bay, with a white left forefoot, had been taken out quietly and had not yet been returned. That it was a messenger sent by the queen he felt sure, and he was determined to sift the mystery to the bottom.

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Young day had taken the place of misty dawn when the jester saw hurrying across the courtyard the same brown figure that had departed the day before. The face was turned toward him and he now caught a full and clear view of it. It was young Velasco,—there was no doubt of it.

It was but a step to the page's room and there Brusquet hurried in order to question the boy as soon as he appeared.

A page dressed in yellow silk slashed with velvet lay asleep on the bed. The jester stepped forward and surveyed him. There, sleeping peacefully with his arm under his head and the ugly plaster disfiguring his cheek, was young Velasco!

It would have been impossible for the boy to have traversed the halls, climb two flights of stairs and changed his clothes while Brusquet was turning from the window.

The jester shivered with fear. It was not a matter for him to investigate, he felt sure, for it was a case of witchcraft. He crossed himself and fled.

Petronilla was awakened by some one shaking her arm. Opening her eyes she beheld Pedro and Doña Ysabel standing beside her bed. The latter hurried Petronilla into a closet and quickly dressed the little girl in her proper costume, carefully tucking her hair under the little cap, while Pedro put on the page's suit of yellow silk.

The little girl was about to rejoin her brother when she heard the doctor's voice. The good man

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had brought his friend to bear witness to the wonderful cure wrought by his lotion.

"Ah, good morning, my lad," said the doctor cheerily. Then as Pedro turned his head he said angrily: "I see you have put on that plaster again! Why you should be wedded to that thing I do not know. However, it is easily removed, and, my brother, you shall see one of the most remarkable cures of the age. This wound when I dressed it was quite severe and painful, and, as you well know, even a small cut that draws blood does not usually disappear in twenty-four hours, leaving not a trace behind it. Not a trace, I give you my word, can now be found on this cheek!"

The other doctor looked doubtful in spite of this positive assertion, but his colleague drew the boy toward him with an "I'll-soon-show-you" kind of air and cried, "Tut, tut!" as Pedro winced under his hands.

"You see," he cried, "what imagination will do, for there is no longer a cut here." Great was his surprise and dismay to find not only a cut but a very angry one, for Doña Ysabel's application had done a good deal of harm.

The old physician stared in surprise while his friend laughed disagreeably. "I knew you were mistaken," he remarked.

"I tell you I was not mistaken!" cried the other. "I will leave it to the lad himself. Was not the wound entirely well when I last examined it?"

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"It may have so seemed to you, sir," replied Pedro, "but it never has ceased to pain me."

"It is the fault of that plaster!" said the old doctor, anxious to find an excuse for this strange state of things.

"A plaster," said his friend quietly, "never could bring back a cut that had once been thoroughly healed. You will excuse me, my friend, but your sight is no longer as keen as it once was, and this fact, together with your faith in your medicine—"

"Rubbish!" interrupted the other. "I know what I know."

"I beg of you, sir, to give me something to ease my pain, for I suffer greatly," said the patient, who was afraid the two learned men would come to blows on his account.

The necessary remedies were applied and with a sigh of satisfaction the boy sank on the couch, while the two doctors left the room, arguing fiercely as long as their voices could be heard.

As soon as the coast was clear Petronilla ran from the closet and clasped her brother in her arms. "Oh, brother!" she cried. "I have such news for you! Our mother is here!"

"Here!" cried the boy, springing from the bed with one bound.

"Yes. It is she and not Aunt Catalina who is the wife of the Count de Saint-Victor."

"You must be dreaming. Where is she now?"

"That is what I do not know and it seems so

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strange to me. I saw her just for a moment when I was attending her Majesty last night in your place. And then I asked permission to go, for I was afraid of what she would say, not knowing the secret. She would not have been deceived—she would have known it was I. I thought she would ask for us at once and try to find us, but she did not."

"Nilla," said her brother earnestly, "you did not see our mother. You were frightened and wretched and you thought first of her because we always went to her with our troubles. She is not here—it would be—it would be too good to be true!"

At this moment a lady entered the room. She wore a velvet gown trimmed in fur; a jeweled chain hung from her waist and jewels sparkled on her fingers. She looked a court-lady from the tips of her little velvet shoes to the top of her little velvet cap, and she threw her arms about the twins as if she would smother them both in her embrace.

There was no doubt about it,—some good things do happen in this world,—this was their mother! At first they all three cried from very joy, then the mother wept because her boy was wounded; but Pedro reassured her and promised that he soon would be well and without a scar.

"And so you see I am married, my darlings," said their mother. "I have come to the court to live always near you. I knew this when you went

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away from me, else my heart would have been broken. The count is the best man in all the world and already loves you both."

"But why did you not come to us sooner?" asked her daughter, clinging to her as if she were afraid her mother would melt away and disappear.

"We arrived late and I asked for you at once. But Madame la Marquise said there was a secret of the queen's which would prevent my seeing either of you for the present, and that I was not to come to you until I had received permission of her Majesty. Imagine my disappointment, for it seemed to me I could not wait another minute."

"I was in the room when you entered it, mother dear," said Petronilla. "Did you get a glimpse of me?"

"No. Had I done so I am afraid I should have thrown prudence to the winds and clasped you in my arms as I do at this moment."

"And you are the Countess de Saint-Victor! How strange!" said Pedro. "And you are more beautiful than ever, mother."

She laid her fingers over his mouth. "Hush, little flatterer! It is only because I have emerged from my shabby gowns that you talk so. It is the feathers that make the bird so fine."

A page came to the door with a parcel for Pedro. "It is from his Majesty, the king," he said.

The package contained a purse of gold network filled with coin.

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"His Majesty said last night that you should be rewarded because of the accident," said his sister.

"I am a very lucky boy," observed Pedro.

"And my Nilla is to serve her mother instead of Madame la Marquise," said their mother. "And I have permission to nurse my boy until he is well; so come to my rooms at once."

The Count de Saint-Victor had an affectionate greeting for his son and daughter, as he called them, and he ever was a kind and gentle father to them.

Pedro recovered and was in higher favor than ever with Queen Eleanor. There had been a plot between the dauphin and others to arrest Charles the Fifth at Chantilly. There are different opinions as to why it was abandoned, but her Majesty was as grateful to Pedro as if he had saved her brother's life and she did not forget the fact that the twins had assisted her to the best of their ability at a time when she was suffering from great anxiety.

CHAPTER XXVIII

NIGHT IN THE OLD CASTLE

Fabien was now a kind of cousin by marriage and he was well pleased with his new aunt. During the following year, when Pedro had obtained leave of absence from the queen, Fabien accompanied the Saint-Victors and the Velasco twins southward to their old castle on the mountain side.

Feeling that it would not be fair to deprive their old servants of the pleasures of anticipation, the countess sent a messenger to inform them of the expected visit.

Then ensued the most serious disagreement that ever had existed between Jules and Tomas. They had agreed to arrange the word "Welcome" over the castle gate. Brother François said he would mark the lettering for them on white cloth, and they were to cover the letters with autumn leaves. So far the affair went along amicably enough; but it was when the question rose as to what language was to be used that the argument waxed warm. It should be in French, of course, said French Jules, for was not the count a Frenchman?

It should be in Spanish, of course, said Spanish Tomas, for were not the twins of that race? It

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was the home-coming of the Velascos and not of Monsieur le Comte. Thus they argued the point inch by inch, until Brother François settled it for them by writing the word in the language of Béarn. And so it went up over the castle gate and gorgeous it appeared in letters of crimson and gold.

The king himself might have envied the heartfelt reception accorded the party as it entered the courtyard. There was Aunt Catalina, tall and unbending as ever, but looking older, as if a fine white powder had been sifted over her face and hair. She actually seemed glad to see the twins once more, and was more cordial than they ever had deemed it possible for her to be. She was now the châtelaine of the castle and very proud of her position, doing the honors in a very stately manner. And Jules and Tomas and Olympie and Lenoir, the cobbler and the tailor's apprentice,—all were there to greet them, and afterward the three children rushed away to find Tonito, all hugging him at once, which composite caress he received with apparent gratification.

When they entered the kitchen a deep voice said, "Help! help! Jules, Jules, come here!" They looked at each other and laughed merrily. It was Gris.

"He is always asking for me," said old Jules proudly. "He could not get along without me. The way that bird revolves things in his brain is

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wonderful! He will reflect for hours with his feathers ruffled, remaining perfectly quiet. Then he will call me as if he would like to tell me the result of his meditations."

"Has he ever told you what he was thinking about, Jules?" asked Fabien with a grin.

"Not yet, Monsieur le Marquis, but who knows how soon he may do so?"

When the shadows fell and the night-wind swept down the mountains the grown people remained in the salon; but the children went to the kitchen where, in the cheerful glow of the fire, they sat with their old friends, while Jules, his round face beaming with hospitality, roasted chestnuts in the hot ashes and served them with a sweet and spicy drink such as only he knew how to make.

Here the twins told of the various happenings at court, while their simple audience listened entranced. But they did not tell of Pedro's ride to deliver the letter to the King of Spain, or of the time when Petronilla personated her brother, for that, you know, was the queen's secret.

And so, while they are still in the bright realm of childhood with not a care to sadden them, let us bid the queen's page and his sister good-by.

THE END

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